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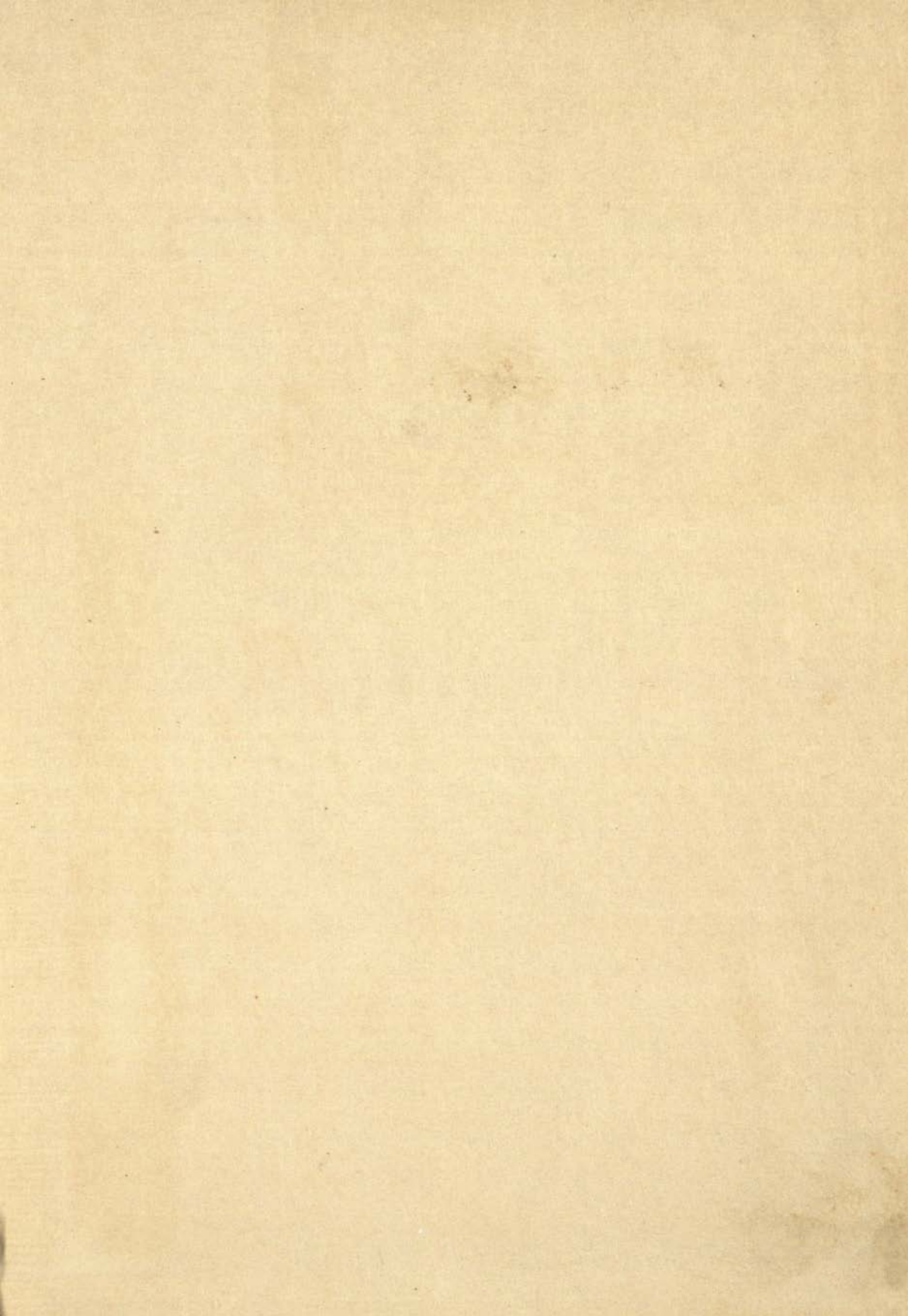
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**EARLY  
SCULPTURE  
OF  
BENGAL**





# EARLY SCULPTURE OF BENGAL

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S. K. SARASWATI



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किं वर्णयामि तव शीलमचिन्त्यमेतत्

महाराष्ट्र

महाराष्ट्र राज्य सरकार



## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

This book, first published in 1937, has long remained out of print and it is regretted that a second edition could not be made available at an earlier date. In 1945 the author revised the text with a view to publish a second edition. But the high cost involved in bringing out a work on art delayed the publication inordinately until, in 1961, Messrs Sambodhi Publications Private Limited graciously came forward to include it in their programme. The author feels deeply indebted to this new firm, particularly to its able and enterprising director, Sri Ramendranath Mukherjee, for this act of enlightened gesture.

Within the last fifteen years many new and interesting materials, relevant to the theme of the book, have been discovered. In a way, hence, this delay, rather long as it may appear, has proved to be an advantage, inasmuch as it has afforded the author an opportunity to incorporate them in the second edition. Reports of such discoveries are not always readily available and the author regrets that he could not include the description and illustration of a fine late Gupta image of Buddha, very recently discovered at Bhasua Bihar, near Mahasthan (Bogra district, North Bengal), information of which has just been supplied to him by Dr. Ahmad Hasan Dani of Dacca.

This second edition, which is now presented to the scholars, is practically a new work. In revising the earlier text a major portion has been re-written; a new chapter on terracottas has been added; in the first edition there were only twenty-four illustrations; in this the number of illustrations is sixty-two. It is for the scholars to judge how far the author has succeeded in his task.

On the subject of illustrations the author begs to be excused for his inability to secure photographs of objects in Pakistan for preparation of blocks for this edition. Such objects constitute the majority and for them blocks had to be prepared from published reproductions. Every effort has, however, been made to have as clear illustrations as possible under the circumstances,



but not always with success. The author has to offer his sincere thanks to Sri Ajitmohan Gupta of Messrs Bharat Phototype Studio for the care and pains that he bestowed in this regard.

The author has spared no pains to append detailed references at the end of each chapter. With such references it has not been thought necessary to add a bibliography at the end of the book.

For the illustrations the author has fully expressed his indebtedness in 'Acknowledgements' appended to the list of illustrations. Here he wishes to thank particularly his friend Sri Deva Prasad Ghosh, M.A., Curator, Asutosh Museum of Indian Art, Calcutta University, and his former pupil Sri Paresh Chandra Das Gupta, M.A., now Director of Archaeology, Government of West Bengal, for the kind supply of photographs of objects in their custody together with the permission to reproduce them.

The author has next to thank the Printers, Messrs Sree Saraswaty Press Private Limited, for their care and promptness in printing the book. He is also grateful to Sri Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, M.A. one of his former pupils, for preparing the Index with much careful attention. Last but not the least, he is immensely indebted to another of his former pupils, Sri Kalyan Kumar Das Gupta, M.A., now Lecturer, Government Sanskrit College, Calcutta, who has been his mentor and guide in getting the book through the press.

January 1, 1962

S. K. SARASWATI



## PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

This brochure is the outcome of my first year's work as a Post-Graduate Research Fellow in the University of Calcutta. It deals with the pre-Pāla sculptures of Bengal and is a prelude to a bigger volume, which proposes to discuss the sculptural history of the province down to the Muhammandan conquest. An attempt has been made in these pages to approach the subject from the standpoint of evolution as well as from the point of view of iconography. The art of terracotta has, however, been left out, as this branch of art, being particularly the art of Bengal, should justly be reserved for a separate treatment.

I take this opportunity to express my deep sense of gratitude to Mr. Syamaprasad Mukherjee, M.A., B.L., Barrister-at-Law, M.L.A., the Vice-Chancellor of the Calcutta University, but for whose sympathy and kindness in the award of the fellowship such a study would not have been possible. To Dr. Hemchandra Rai Chaudhuri, M.A., Ph.D., Carmichael Professor, Ancient Indian History and Culture, I gratefully owe the selection of my subject and many helpful directions and guidance throughout the progress of the work. I am further indebted to my other teachers of the Calcutta University, and especially to Mr. Jitendra Nath Banerjea, M.A., for several important suggestions. My obligations are also due to Mr. N. G. Majumdar, M.A., F.R.A.S.B., Superintendent, Archaeological Survey of India, for kindly allowing me access to the photographs preserved in the office of the Eastern Circle, and to Kumar Sarat Kumar Ray, M.A., the Founder-President of the Varendra Research Society of Rajshahi, for his generous permission to quote passages from manuscripts in his private collection. Figures 1-7 are reproduced from photographs, kindly supplied for the purpose by the authorities of the Varendra Research Society, Rajshahi, while the rest are from the Archaeological Survey of India, by kind permission of Mr. N. G. Majumdar, M.A., F.R.A.S.B.





## CONTENTS

	PAGE
Preliminary Observations	1
Pre-Gupta Sculptures	10
Gupta Sculptures	17
Pāhārpur Sculptures : A Review	37
Pāhārpur Sculptures : First Group	51
Pāhārpur Sculptures : Second Group	65
Pāhārpur Sculptures : Third Group	81
Terracottas	91
Concluding Observations	113
List of Illustrations	119
Acknowledgements	122
Index	123



**EARLY SCULPTURE OF BENGAL**





## CHAPTER ONE

### PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

The specimens of Bengal sculpture, that we are accustomed to see now-a-days in the various public and private collections and scattered throughout the ancient divisions of Puṇḍra, Suhma, Vaṅga and Samataṭa, mostly belong to a period of art activity in this region which synchronised with the period of political pre-eminence, namely the Pāla and Sena epoch, roughly from the eighth to the twelfth centuries A.D. The relics of this period are numerous as well as wide spread. To speak of sculptural art of Bengal, hence, one usually understands this Pāla art and the idea is also current that Bengal did possess no art earlier to, and apart from, this art. It represents, however, as we shall see in these pages, a late period in the art history of this land of ours. This art has long been before the public and is represented in various collections, both in and outside India. Many scholars have studied this art and, besides many articles in the various journals, there have been published several books on the subject. Though all of them cannot be said to be quite satisfactory, they offer competent guides for a fuller and more comprehensive study of Pāla art. It is thus and owing to the fact that earlier sculptures have not come to light in appreciable numbers, or where they have their early dates have not been recognised, that one has come to regard an artistic phase, which is really late, as the starting point and the sole legacy of Bengal in sculptural art prior to the Muhammadan conquest of the land.

It would be difficult to say when the fine arts began to flourish in Bengal, but presumably they did begin from very early times. Western scholars on art cannot conceive of the existence of a pre-artistic state in human society. In his excellent book, *The Fine Arts*, G. Baldwin Brown<sup>1</sup> draws from the poet Schiller "an imaginary picture of a pre-artistic state in which the whole faculties of the human creature are bound up under the pressure of his surroundings". The poet, it is needless to say, did not believe in such a state,



nor does Baldwin Brown who states, "as a matter of fact such a condition of complete bondage to the outward is not known to man who at every stage of development has found time for art." In a subsequent edition of the same book<sup>2</sup> he describes art as "a product of human nature born before civilisation, but nurtured by civilisation to further growth." "Art," says Vogt,<sup>3</sup> "is not something detached from life: it makes life and is made by it. It appears in every age and represents to us the life of which it is a part."

A similar state of artistic activity in India even from the dawn of human society may be inferred from statements in the Indian Śilpa texts which attribute the origin of the science of art and architecture to Brahmā, the Creator of the universe in Hindu mythology. Thus we have in the *Bṛihat Saṃhitā* of Varāhamihira, a standard work, the date of which has been accepted by all scholars to be the sixth century A.D.:

*Vāstu-jñānam=athātāḥ Kamalabhavanān=muni-parampar=āyātām*,<sup>4</sup> i.e. "The knowledge of the science of architecture (and necessarily of sculpture and other allied arts which may be regarded as corollaries to architecture) has come down from Brahmā through an unbroken series of seers." Later texts, too, while enumerating the names of the great masters of art, refer to Brahmā, the Creator, as the original god from whom sprang the generations of artists of different denominations. Thus we find in the *Mānasāra*:<sup>5</sup>

*Pūrv=ānane Viśvakarmā jāyate dakṣiṇe Mayāḥ |*  
*Uttarasya mukhe Tvaṣṭā paśchime tu Manuḥ smṛitāḥ | |*  
*Viśvakarm=ākhyo nāmno'sya putraḥ sthapatir=uchyate |*  
*Mayasya tanayāḥ sūtragrāh=īti parikīrtitāḥ | |*  
*Tvaṣṭur=devarsheḥ putraḥ vardhak=īti prakathyate |*  
*Manoḥ putras=takshakaḥ syāt sthāpaty=ādi chatusṭayam | |*

In brief, we have from the above verses that from the four faces of Brahmā originated the four heavenly artists, namely Viśvakarman, Maya, Tvaṣṭri and Manu. Their sons are called respectively *Sthapati*, *Sūtragrahī*, *Vardhakī* and *Takshaka*. These latter represent the four classes of terrestrial artists, namely the architect, the draughtsman-designer, the painter and the engraver. Many such similar texts may be quoted, but the above two are sufficient to show that in the Indian *Śilpaśāstras* the origin



of art was ascribed to the Creator himself, which is but a figurative way of suggesting that the origin of art was coeval with creation.

This state of artistic activity even from the beginning of creation does not look improbable when we remember the intimate relation between art and religion. Scholars and philosophers are agreed, and with this Indian philosophy of art is in full agreement, that "art and religion belong together by identities of origin, subject matter and inner experience. . . . The experience of faith and the experience of beauty are in some measure identical."<sup>6</sup> This statement of Vogt, particularly oriental in bearing and significance, is now nothing new in the West, where such a view has been gaining ground since the time of Plotinus, the eminent founder of Neo-Platonism, through a series of illustrious thinkers and philosophers. This intimate relation of art and religion becomes also evident when we come to survey man's artistic handiworks of every age and of every clime and find that almost without exception they were created by religion. "All the art of the human race," says Alessandro Della Seta, "is essentially religious art". Indeed, anthropological research has shown that religion had been the primary source of primitive arts, and history declares that art, whether monumental or plastic, came into being as a handmaid of religion. It will not be far wrong, hence, to say that "the beginnings of religion and art alike lie far back and hidden in the immemorial life of the primitive man", and the historian can tell us nothing about the actual beginnings of artistic activity among men.

In view of the above observations, which are, no doubt, universal in application, we have to assume the existence of an artistic state in Bengal even from the dawn of life. We have, however, no knowledge as to how far back its origins lie and its condition in the remote pre-historic period. Nevertheless, coming to the historic period and to a study of the plastic art of this territory we find that there are authentic evidences to suggest the existence of sculptural activity in Bengal prior to the Pāla period, which is regarded as the only period of art activity in Bengal before the Muhammadan conquest. It will be our endeavour in these pages to study the course of pre-Pāla sculpture of Bengal.

The fragmentary early Brāhmī inscription from Mahāsthān<sup>7</sup> (North Bengal), ascribed to the Maurya period, the Susunia



(Bankura district) rock inscription of Chandravarman<sup>8</sup> (c. fourth century A.D.), the copperplate inscriptions from Dhānāidaha,<sup>9</sup> Dāmodarpur,<sup>10</sup> Baigrām<sup>11</sup> and Pāhārpur<sup>12</sup> (all from North Bengal and assignable to the fifth century A.D. except the last of the five plates from Dāmodarpur which is dated in the sixth), the Gunaighar (Tippera, East Bengal) grant of Mahārāja Vainyagupta,<sup>13</sup> the Faridpur (East Bengal) copperplates of Mahārājādhirājas Gopachandra, Dharmāditya<sup>14</sup> and Samāchāradeva<sup>15</sup> (c. sixth century A.D.), the Mallasārul (Burdwan district) copperplate of Gopachandra,<sup>16</sup> the Midnapore copperplates of Śaśāṅka<sup>17</sup> (c. seventh century A.D.), the Vappaghoshavāṭa (West Bengal) grant of Jayanāga<sup>18</sup> (c. seventh century A.D.), the innumerable incidental references to different parts of ancient Bengal in early literary texts, as well as the discovery of coins, beginning from the earliest Indian currency, the punch-marked issues, to the late Gupta one, bear eloquent testimonies to well-ordered forms of society and government and other conditions favourable for the development of arts and crafts in Bengal since the time of the imperial Mauryas in the third century B.C. The cities of Puṇḍravardhana and Tāmralipti emerged in full glory even in the pre-Christian times. Koṭivarsha, Pushkaraṇā, Karṇasuvarṇa, etc. were flourishing cities long before the Pālas rose to power and prominence. In the seventh century A.D. Hiuen Tsang testifies to the grandeur and magnificence of the metropolitan city of Puṇḍravardhana, with tanks, hospices and flower gardens alternated here and there.<sup>19</sup> This shows that the people were not indifferent to the idea of the beautiful and it might be naturally expected that the monumental arts of architecture and sculpture were not neglected by them. We should mention in this connection that in some of the Śilpa texts we find rules for the making of beautiful tanks and the laying out of pleasure gardens, and according to the definition given by Śukrāchārya<sup>20</sup> these rules should also be included in the *Śilpaśāstras*. But the elaborate prescriptions for the making of temples, images and palaces have everywhere been given the place of honour in relation to which every other art has been treated as an accessory. It may be presumed, hence, that the monumental arts were not unknown to the people who knew how to beautify their cities with well laid-out tanks and gardens.



This view becomes evident when we find that every inscription mentioned above, except the first, was a religious record having some connection with a pious establishment, either a temple (*devakula*) or a monastery (*vihāra*).

In Bengal *stūpas* were erected from comparatively early times and Hiuen Tsang speaks of the existence of several *stūpas*, said to have been built by the great Aśoka to commemorate the holy sites in Bengal where Gautama Buddha was believed to have preached his doctrine in person.<sup>21</sup> The Mṛigasthāpana *stūpa* in Varendra<sup>22</sup> may go back to the third century A.D. Monasteries sprang up for the residence of monks, both Jaina and Buddhist. The Pāhārpur copperplate of the (Gupta) year 159 (A.D. 478-79)<sup>23</sup> gives evidence of the existence of a Jaina *vihāra* at Vaṭagohālī in Puṇḍravardhana, while the Chinese traveller, Fa-hien, a little earlier counts no less than twenty-two Buddhist monasteries, all with resident priests, in Tāmralipti only.<sup>24</sup> In the seventh century A.D. the more celebrated Hiuen Tsang records the existence of more than seventy such in the whole of Bengal.<sup>25</sup> In the easternmost parts of the state we have evidence of the construction of a monastery, to be dedicated to the god Avalokiteśvara, in the early years of the sixth century A.D.<sup>26</sup> and in the seventh we have evidence of at least one other monastery being favoured and patronised by the Khadga kings of south and eastern Bengal.<sup>27</sup> The prestige and prosperity of a few of these monasteries had been recorded for us by the Chinese pilgrims. Hiuen Tsang takes special notice of the Po-shi-po monastery in Pun-na-fa-tan-na (Puṇḍravardhana) and the Lo-to-mo-chih monastery in Kie-lo-na-su-fa-la-na (Karnasuvarṇa). The courts of the Po-shi-po monastery, he says, "are lighty and roomy; its towers and pavilions are very lofty. The priests are seven hundred in number; they study the law according to the Great Vehicle. Many renowned priests from Eastern India dwell here."<sup>28</sup> The halls of the Lo-to-mo-chih monastery, again, were light and spacious and the storeyed towers very lofty.<sup>29</sup> I-tsing, another Chinese traveller (A.D. 673-87), has left us also a graphic and picturesque account of the University of Bha-ra-ha in Tāmralipti with its inner life, organisation, discipline, splendour and fame.<sup>30</sup> Beautiful temples were in existence as might be inferred from the inscriptions, ranging in date from the early Gupta period, which frequently



refer to temples of various gods for whose maintenance lands were purchased and donated. Indeed, as we come to know from the indefatigable Hiuen Tsang, there were more than three hundred *deva* temples all over Bengal,<sup>31</sup> perhaps a fair estimate of the number that existed in his time.

Architecture and sculpture go hand in hand. In fact, in India the two should be regarded as but branches of the same art, the art of worship if one may be allowed to use the term. Neither can be said to be complete without the other. Scholars, like A. K. Coomaraswamy, have shown how the spirit of adoration, the loving and passionate devotion to a personal deity which we know as *bhakti*, has governed the evolution of Indian art from the earliest times onwards. This doctrine of *bhakti* led to the creation of the plastic symbol of the god (*deva*), i.e. his image (*archchā, pratimā*). For the enshrinement of the image was required the temple, as the canonical injunction prohibits the worship of images above a certain height in private chapels and prescribes public temples for their proper installation and consecration.<sup>32</sup> For the image thus was created the temple and for the temple, again, were required other images and plastic forms, as much for its embellishment and beatification as for the satisfaction of the canonical need for setting up, along with the presiding deity, attendant divinities (*parivāra-devatās, pārśva-devatās*), doorkeepers (*dvāra-pālas*) and the like in different niches of the temple walls. Thus was the relation of architecture and sculpture inseparable in India. The evidence of the existence of so many temples in Bengal prior to the Pāla regime should then reasonably indicate a fairly active period of architecture and sculpture before the Pāla school of art was evolved and developed.

It is apparent, therefore, that sculptural art was not an unknown feature in the early history of Bengal. But early sculpture appears to be non-existent in comparison with the state of things which we may reasonably expect in a well-ordered flourishing society with the evidence of the existence of every kind of religious edifices, known in other parts of India. An explanation for such circumstances is probably to be sought for in the fact that our collections consist chiefly of what we may call chance and accidental finds from tanks and ditches of the latest period and from the surface of the ground, and not in a paucity of artists or of art



products in Bengal before the rise of the Pālas. Archaeologically, Bengal has been a rather neglected territory, though there seems to be no dearth of prospective sites for archaeological exploration within her boundaries. It is the lack of proper exploration that may account for the comparative scantiness of early Bengal sculpture. A systematic exploration of the old sites in this region is expected to yield valuable results in the shape of earlier specimens of Bengal sculpture. The excavations at Pāhārpur (North Bengal) furnish a striking example of what a systematic exploration may yield in this direction. Recently, stray explorations in lower Bengal, conducted by the University of Calcutta, have led to the discovery of a number of interesting sites together with a mass of antiquities including a very large number of valuable specimens of terracotta art of the early phases. In this situation we welcome the institution by the Government of West Bengal of the State Department of Archaeology which is expected to carry on fruitful investigations under expert guidance and supervision.

In assigning the specimens of sculpture to specific periods one has to depend on dates recorded on them. Such dates, no doubt, afford a firm chronological basis. Mere inscriptions too on a particular sculpture help a good deal in this direction by way of palaeographical evidence. In certain instances (*e.g.* in excavations) the stratigraphical evidence immensely helps us in ascertaining the chronology of a particular sculpture. Our knowledge of Bengal sculpture is based chiefly on accidental finds, and as such we have not the advantage that relics laid bare in excavations have in stratigraphical records for determining their dates. The majority of the finds, again, contain neither any date nor any inscription. Under these circumstances, the only means of dating a sculpture has been the testimony of style. Such an evidence may, at first sight, appear to be deceptive, as, apart from the characteristics of a certain school or certain phase of art, there is always the element of skill of an individual artist to be taken into account. On the whole, however, the sculptures of Maurya, Śuṅga, Kushāṇa, Gupta and Pāla periods represent distinct types and forms and, within these main divisions at least, they may, in nearly all cases, be classified with confidence.



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1. G. Baldwin Brown, *The Fine Arts*, 1st ed., p. 3.
2. *Ibid.*, 4th ed., p. 23.
3. Ogden Vogt, *Art and Religion*, p. 10.
4. *Bṛihat Saṃhitā*, Chap. lviii.
5. *Mānasāra*, Chap. ii.
6. Ogden Vogt, *loc. cit.*, p. 19.

For the Indian point of view reference should be made to two very admirable essays by A. K. Coomaraswamy, 'Hindu View of Art: Historical' and 'Hindu View of Art: Theory of Beauty' included in his publication, *The Dance of Śiva*, and his statement, "Religion and art are thus names for one and the same experience—an intuition of reality and of identity." *loc. cit.*, pp. 35-36.

7. *E.I.*, Vol. XXI, pp. 83-91.
8. *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 133.
9. *Ibid.*, Vol. XVII, pp. 345-48.
10. *Ibid.*, Vol. XV, pp. 113-45; XVII, pp. 193 ff.
11. *Ibid.*, Vol. XXI, pp. 78-83.
12. *Ibid.*, Vol. XX, pp. 59-64.
13. *I.H.Q.*, Vol. VI, pp. 44 ff.
14. *Ind. Ant.*, Vol. XXX, pp. 193-216.
15. *E.I.*, Vol. XVIII, pp. 74-86.
16. *Ibid.*, Vol. XXIII, pp. 155 ff.
17. *J.R.A.S.B.L.*, Vol. XI, Letters, pp. 1-9.
18. *E.I.*, Vol. XVIII, pp. 60-64.
19. T. Watters, *On Yuan Chwang*, Vol. II, p. 184.
20. *Śukranītisāra* (ed. by Jivānanda Vidyāsāgara), IV. 3. 58:  
*Prāsāda-pratim=ārāma-griha-vāpy=ādi satkṛtiḥ |*  
*Kathilā yatra tach=chhilpaśāstram=uktaṃ maharshibhiḥ | |*
21. T. Watters, *loc. cit.*, pp. 184, 185, 190, 191.
22. Alfred Foucher, *Etudes sur l'Iconographie Bouddhique de l'Inde d'après des documents nouveaux*, pp. 62-63, Pl. I. 4; R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *History of Bengal*, Vol. I, pp. 69-70.
23. *E.I.*, Vol. XX, pp. 59-64.
24. J. Legge, *Travels of Fahien*, p. 100.
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26. *I.H.Q.*, Vol. VI, pp. 44 ff.
27. *M.A.S.B.*, Vol. III, pp. 85-91.
28. S. Beal, *Records of the Western World*, Vol. II, p. 184.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 209.
30. J. Takakasu, *I-tsing's Record of the Buddhist Religion*, Chap. X.
31. T. Watters, *loc. cit.*, pp. 184, 185, 190, 191.
32. *Matsya Purāṇa* (Vaṅgavāsī ed.), Chap. 258, verses 22 f:  
*Āṅgushṭha-parvād=ārabhya vitastiṃ yāvad=eva tu |*  
*Grihe vai pratimā kāryyā n=ādhikā śasyate buddhaiḥ | |*  
*Āśhoḍaśāt=tu prāsāde karttavyā n=ādhikā tataḥ |*  
*Madhy=ottamā-kanishṭhā tu kāryyā vitt=ānusārataḥ | |*



## CHAPTER TWO

### PRE-GUPTA SCULPTURES

Leaving aside the art of the Indus civilisations which, in the words of a learned scholar of Indian antiquities, represents the pre-history of Indian art, its history may be said to have begun in the third century B. C. under the fostering care of the imperial Mauryas, especially of Aśoka. Among the scanty relics of the period may be mentioned the monumental animal figures crowning the edict columns of Aśoka<sup>1</sup> and a number of fragmentary terracotta sculptures recovered from the site of the Mauryan capital city. In Bengal proper no stone sculpture of this early period has come to light as yet, though other antiquities, such as inscriptions,<sup>2</sup> coins<sup>3</sup> and specimens of terracotta art,<sup>4</sup> which may be assigned to this period, have been accidentally discovered from several of the older sites of this territory. It may be expected, hence, that stone sculptures too are likely to come up on a proper exploration and excavation of the sites concerned.

In the subsequent period, but prior to the beginning of the Christian era, which may be generally designated as the Śunga-Kāṇva phase, we have, in Northern India, the decorative bas-reliefs on the railing and *torāṇas* (gateways) round the *Stūpa* of Bhārhut (c. 150 B. C.), on the old railing round the Bodhi tree at Bodhgayā (c. 100 B. C.), on the four *torāṇas* of the Great *Stūpa* at Sāñchī (c. 50 B. C.) and the nearly contemporary cave reliefs of Udayagiri and Khaṇḍagiri near Bhuvaneśvara in Orissa. To this period may be assigned the fragmentary stone sculpture at Siluā in the district of Noākhālī (East Bengal).<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, no detailed description of this object is available, but the inscription in Brāhmī characters of the second century B. C., which it bears, leaves no doubt about its date. Artistic movement during this early period being more or less uniform throughout the country, it is likely that this sculpture is not far removed from the contemporary productions with which we are familiar in other parts of India. In Bengal, as in the rest of India, this phase



is particularly notable for artistic activity in terracotta which is reserved for separate treatment in a subsequent chapter.

During the Kushāṇa period, roughly from the first to the third centuries A.D., we have the prolific school of Mathurā with its treasurehouse of figures, sculptures and images representing Buddhist, Jaina as well as other orthodox forms of early Indian belief. The question of the origin and development of image worship in India has led to many controversies. Our scope does not permit us to enter into a discussion of them. It may suffice to say that it is in the first century of the Christian era that the innate anthropomorphism and iconism of the Indian mind, lying dormant under the pressure of the preponderance of the aniconic Vedic religion, asserted with vigour and found expression in the creation of images of the divinities of the chief religious systems. With the introduction of the cult image a new direction was perceptible in Indian art of which Mathurā was the great centre. Sculptures and images carved in Mathurā tradition and Mathurā medium have been found over a large area, as far south as Sāñchī in Madhya Pradesh,<sup>6</sup> as far east as Patna and Rājgīr in Bihar,<sup>7</sup> Sāheth-Māheth in Uttar Pradesh<sup>8</sup> in the north and Taxila in the west.<sup>9</sup> The chief material of the Mathurā artists was the spotted red sandstone, usually called the Agra or Sikri red sandstone.

Several sculptures from Bengal may be recognised to have distinct affinities with the Kushāṇa art idiom. One of them is a small fragment (about 3½ inches in height) representing the head and bust of Buddha-Bodhisattva in mottled red sandstone discovered from Chandraketurah in Twenty-four Parganas district (West Bengal).<sup>9a</sup> The second is a red stone torso of a divine figure (perhaps Kārtikeya ?) found from Skanda Dhāp at Mahāsthān (Bogra district, North Bengal, East Pakistan), the site of the ancient city of Puṇḍravardhana. They are now deposited in the Asutosh Museum of Indian Art, Calcutta University. In form and style they can be definitely ascribed to the Kushāṇa period. Four other sculptures have been discovered from different parts of North Bengal and are now preserved in the Museum of the Varendra Research Society, Rājshāhī (East Pakistan). Three among these four sculptures are in coarse-grained sandstone, while the fourth is in a kind of basalt. Two of these represent Sūrya, one found at Kumārpur and the other at Niyāmatpur



(both in the Rajshahi district). The third one is of Vishṇu and was found at Hānkraih (Maldah district). The fourth one represents a colossal head discovered from Dinājpur. These four have significant affinities with the Kushāṇa idiom of art and may be tentatively assigned to that age.

FIG. 1

The head and bust of Buddha-Bodhisattva from Chandraketurgarh have all the characteristic traits of the colossal Kushāṇa Buddha-Bodhisattva images found in such sites as Sārnāth, Sāheth-Māheth, Kauśāmbī, Mathurā, etc. and, though in miniature, has the same stolid dignity in its physical form and bearing. Both the hands are broken away, the right completely. The left, of which the upper portion now remains, seems from its position to have been held to waist. A drapery covers the left shoulder and the upper torso, the folds being indicated by prominent ridges on the left upper arm. Here we find a sturdy bust surmounted by a shaven head supported on a heavy neck, all distinctive of the physical type of Kushāṇa Buddha-Bodhisattva images. On the upper torso the drapery is, to a certain extent, diaphanously treated revealing the modelling underneath. An attempt towards a thin and transparent treatment of the drapery may assign the fragment to a period not earlier than the second century A.D. The red stone torso from Mahāsthān shows a two-handed male figure, the left hand bearing a long staff and the right held in *abhaya*. A rather refined and sensitive modelling characterises the figure and in this respect and in the treatment of the scarves and their knots the figure has a close affinity to a Nāga figure at Mathurā,<sup>9b</sup> and might have been co-eval with it in date.

FIG. 3

The Sūrya image from Kumārpur is an extremely coagulated specimen and shows the god standing on a high pedestal, showing the seven horses of the Sun-chariot, between his two attendants. In his two hands the god holds two lotuses by the stalks (*sanāla-padma*). Broad and heavy features, long tunic, open round eyes, flat and low head-dress are worth noticing in this image. The Niyāmatpur specimen is executed in a coarse-grained sandstone. Here the god stands erect on a low pedestal between two dwarf attendants, Daṇḍī and Piṅgala, and is dressed in a flat cap and a long tunic fastened to the waist by a belt. He holds a pair of lotuses by stalks in the two hands, as enjoined in the *dhyaṇas*. But the horses of the Sun-chariot are not shown in this image.



The wheel of the chariot and the two female attendants of the god, his consorts, are also absent in both the images. Apparently, they belong to a period when the iconography of the god had not yet been stereotyped. The Hānkrail image of Vishṇu is a relief-like free-standing sculpture. Kramrisch gives the following description of the image in *Rūpam*, No. 40. "The four-armed figure, of which the two lower arms, now broken, originally were stretched downward, carries the conch in the upper left, a round object (lotus bud ?) in the upper right, wears a low *kirīṭa mukuṭa* (crown), scanty jewellery, peculiar loin cloth (*paridhāna*) clinging to the legs and curled towards the bottom with a folded end hanging between the legs. A squat halo, with design incised, surrounds the head." It is executed in buff-coloured sandstone. In iconographic form it corresponds to an early Vishṇu image from Taxila<sup>10</sup> which is usually assigned to the fourth century A.D.

FIG. 4

The main point of Kushāṇa affinity of these three figures is the distinctly Kushāṇa dress consisting of a long tunic covering the body from the neck to the knees, as is to be found on the royal portraits on Kushāṇa coins. In the Vishṇu image from Hānkrail the upper part of the body seems to be bare, but it is possible that a long close-fitting tunic, treated in a diaphanous fashion, covers the body from the neck to the knees. At least, the lower part of the dress is treated in a manner which is strongly reminiscent of the lower part of the distinctive Kushāṇa dress. All these figures are in low and flat relief, stern economy confining the main effect to the surface, to harsh angles and lines, not unlike what we find in the portrait statues of Kanishka and Chasṭāna (?).<sup>11</sup> All the three, not excluding even the free-standing sculpture of Vishṇu from Hānkrail, are frontal in the most rigorous sense of the term. The accents, as Kramrisch speaks of the Vishṇu, are placed on the linear effect, and not the slightest attempt has been made at the rounding of the contours. These features are characteristic of a secular art tradition at Mathurā, represented by the portrait statues, and combined and compromised with these, we find others in common with the distinctive Kushāṇa tradition at Mathurā, exhibited best in the cult images of the period which the celebrated German scholar, Ludwig Bachhofer, assumes to have been subsequent to the above group. The broad and heavy features, especially the broad shoulders, have distinct affinities



with the early Kushāṇa Buddha-Bodhisattva type at Mathura.<sup>12</sup> Another distinctively Kushāṇa feature, in common with the image group, is that the hands, whether raised as high as the shoulders (as in the case of the Sūrya figures) or lowered down to hips (as in the case of the Viṣṇu image), have always the elbows at some distance from the body, and in the former case the forearms, solidly stuck to the upper arms, make sharp angles at the elbows. The raised eyebrows in the Viṣṇu image, very rarely to be met with in the later sculptures, supply again a significant point of affinity with the Kushāṇa idiom.<sup>13</sup> In the colossal head from Dinājpur the shaven skull, the short but wide open eyes and the raised eyebrows with descending curves at the extremities present clear affinities with the heads of the Buddha-Bodhisattva type at Mathurā, while the moustache, the beard and the sinuous bow of the mouth are closely akin to such features in the sculptures of the contemporary Gandhāra school.

FIG. 2

It has to be admitted indeed that these are only broad affinities and one should not, with confidence, label the above four sculptures as Kushāṇa on the basis of these data only. Yet, in the absence of inscribed records comparison with known dated specimens is the only, and the surest, test for ascertaining the age of a particular sculpture or sculptures. From this standpoint these sculptures under examination present favourable points and affinities for describing them as being contemporary with the Kushāṇa sculptures, especially as the peculiar and distinctive features, described above, have no parallels in any other school or period of art.

It should be pointed out in this connection that the first three among the above four sculptures from North Bengal have sometimes been tentatively attributed to the eighth century A.D. and they have been usually compared with the figures on the stone lintel from Bodhgayā bearing an inscription of the twenty-sixth year of the reign of Dharmapāla.<sup>14</sup> A careful examination, however, reveals divergences in point of modelling and execution which cannot be passed over lightly. For example, the figures on the Bodhgayā lintel are carved not in flat and low relief, but are cut out quite bold so that they come out distinctly from the depth of the background, instead of being compressed into the background as in the sculptures under notice. Moreover, the



features of the Bodhgayā figures are not so heavy as those of the three sculptures we are examining, but exhibit distinct rounding and greater gradation of planes. None of the Bodhgayā figures, again, not even the figure of Sūrya to extreme left, shows the distinctive Kushāṇa dress of these sculptures. We have no evidence that this characteristic Kushāṇa dress persisted as late as the eighth century A.D. We do not find it used in any sculpture of the definitely early Pāla epoch, as we may reasonably expect if these sculptures should really belong to the initial phase of Pāla art. The last that we know of this dress is on the royal portraits on the coins of the early Gupta emperors, but in sculpture we have hardly any evidence that it survived, barring exceptions, so late as the Gupta period. Under these circumstances, the attempt to class these three sculptures as Pāla primitives does not seem to be justified. It is safer rather to class them with the Kushāṇa figures with which they present greater affinities as regards their style and dress, as well as, to a certain extent, in their iconography.

The question may now be raised whether the above sculptures showing clear Kushāṇa affinities were imported from Mathurā or were the products of the local artists. The former alternative may be conceded with regard to the head and bust of Buddha-Bodhisattva from Chandraketurah which is in spotted red sandstone, the distinctive medium of Mathurā artists. We reserve this question for a more detailed discussion in the concluding chapter. In respect of the four other sculptures from North Bengal the absence of the use of red sandstone would, however, preclude the first alternative. The Kushāṇa period was no doubt a great and creative epoch in Indian art, and Mathurā was certainly the most significant centre of this art activity. It has been described to have been a great manufactory whence images were said to have been exported to every direction. Sculptures carved in the Kushāṇa idiom of Mathurā have been discovered as far east as Bihar. It is not surprising, hence, that the local artists in Bengal would be influenced to fashion, after Mathurā, cult images which the Mathurā artists had the distinct honour of creating and diffusing throughout the greater portion of Central and Eastern India.



## REFERENCES

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2. *E.I.*, Vol. XXI, pp. 83-91.
3. *Annual Report of the Varendra Research Society*, Rajshahi, 1931-32, pp. 13-14; *A.S.R.*, 1921-22, pp. 74, 75.
4. See *infra*, Chapter VIII.
5. *A.S.R.*, 1930-34, p. 38.
6. John Marshall, *A Guide to Sanchi*, pp. 29-30, Pls. II, XII.
7. *A.S.R.*, 1905-06, pp. 105-06; *A.S.R.*, *E.C.*, 1913-14, p. 74.
8. *A.S.R.*, 1908-09, p. 34; *J.A.S.B.*, Vol. XLVIII, p. 278.
9. *M.A.S.I.*, No. 7, p. 39.
- 9a. *Indian Archaeology: A Review*, 1957-58, pl. LXXXVII. a.
- 9b. S. K. Saraswati, *loc. cit.*, fig. 56.
10. *Ibid.*, fig. 88.
11. *A.S.R.*, 1911-12, pl. I; *J.B.O.R.S.*, Vol. VI, pp. 51-53.
12. A. K. Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, figs. 79, 83-85.
13. Cf. Stella Kramrisch, *Art of India through the Ages*, pls. 38 and 40.
14. *A.S.R.*, 1908-09, p. 148, fig. 3; R. D. Banerji, *Eastern Indian School of Mediaeval Sculpture*, pl. I. a.

## CHAPTER THREE

### GUPTA SCULPTURES

The Gupta art is the logical outcome of the Kushāṇa art of Mathurā by physical refinement and inner spiritualisation. This is best illustrated by several images of the Buddha-Bodhisattva type belonging respectively to the Kushāṇa and the Gupta periods. The early Kushāṇa Buddha-Bodhisattva type of Mathurā,<sup>1</sup> whether representing a standing or a seated image, exhibits a shaven head with spiral *ushnīsha*, wherever it is preserved, broad shoulders and heavy features and wide open eyes. The pose is extremely stiff, clear *paryāṅka-bandha* (cross-legged posture) when seated, or rigid *samapada-sthānaka* when standing. The right hand, raised as high as the shoulders, appears to be solidly stuck to the upper arm, and the left is either clenched to the hip in case of the standing figure or rests on the thigh in case of the seated one. The elbows, always at some distance from the body, make sharp angles. The drapery, clinging fast to the body, leaves the right shoulder bare, and exhibits deep-cut conventional folds on the left arm. Though indicating a considerable progress in technique, and in spite of a gradual thinning down of the plastic content and volume and a greater relaxation of the rigid attitude in the later ages, these works cannot be said to possess any spiritual import. The faces of these figures as well as their bearings do not convey any psychological meaning. Kramrisch is justly right in saying, that "their open eyes and smiling mouths ill fit the head of a Buddha. When, by the end of the first century A.D., the Buddha-Bodhisattva was given an image, it is that of a ruling and self-possessed figure."<sup>2</sup> Their bearings, gestures and features are expressive of enormous energy, rather than of calm repose and sweetness as are to be expected in a *yogin* with the mind absorbed in meditation. There is no suggestion, again, of any intended grace, except in a physical sense.

This heavy, stolidly built and unspiritual Bodhisattva type of Mathurā was gradually transformed into the delicate, reposeful



and intensely spiritual Buddha type in the Gupta period. The chief centre of this new trend of Indian art was Sārnāth, Isipatana of the ancient days, where the Buddha preached his doctrine for the first time. To the heavy stolidity and earthliness of the Kushāṇa type the Gupta artists added a refined restraint and inner spirituality. The veteran scholar, Ramaprasad Chanda, has ably traced the gradual stages of this transformation from the physical to the spiritual.<sup>3</sup> With this transformation the image may be said to have acquired its true import and Indian art its destined goal. An intensely intellectual process results in the emergence of a new aesthetic ideal<sup>4</sup> that leads to a rarified and idealised form illumined by a conscious and sublime spiritual grace.

It has already been observed that plastically the Gupta sculpture is the logical outcome of the Kushāṇa art of Mathurā. It is also interesting to note that the Gupta plastic conception, in the sense that we have defined, seems to have had its beginnings also in the Mathurā ateliers or with artists trained in that tradition. Among the sculptures, betokening what we describe as the Gupta classical ideal, the earliest, at least so far as extant remains go, is an image of Bodhisattva (so styled in the votive inscription on the pedestal) from Bodhgayā.<sup>5</sup> The image was consecrated in year 64 during the reign of one Mahārāja Trikamala of uncertain identity. The question is whether this date is to be referred to the regnal year of the king, or to an era which is not specified. The palaeography of the inscription may refer it to the fourth century A.D., a date which is also supported by the style of the sculpture. It is not impossible, hence, to refer the date to the era of the Guptas, as has been done by some scholars. The image, no doubt, hails from Bodhgayā. Nevertheless, its Mathurā affiliation is apparent, not only on account of the material, *i.e.* red sandstone, in which it is executed, but also of its style which clearly illustrates the plastic tradition of that great art centre. Much that is of the Mathurā school is still practised. The physical form with its massiveness and stolidity is explicitly a statement of the Mathurā conception of images. The folds of the garment on the left shoulder and forearm are reminiscent, again, of the Mathurā type of drapery. Instead of the shaven head of the Mathurā type, however, the Bodhgayā image shows on the head the hair of a *mahāpuruṣa*, disposed in small curling rings. But the above,



the form, the drapery and hair treatment, represent conventions that are concerned chiefly with the outward appearance of an image. Apart from these, a miraculous transformation seems to have taken place in respect of its artistic character. The rigid geometrical composition introduces a stern discipline which seems to restrain all earthly bearings of the monumentalised body and to endow it with a concentrated energy that has its root in the within. Again, the eyes, with drooping eyelids and glance directed to the tip of the nose, appear to be looking inward signifying the mind absorbed in deep meditation (*dhyāna-yoga*). The face, too, wears an expression of calm contemplation. According to Ramaprasad Chanda this spirit of *dhyāna* or the highest stage of *dhyāna*, known as *samādhi*, permeates every image of the Gupta period, whether Buddhist, Jaina or Brahmanical. To the Indian devotee, he says, every deity is a *dhyāna-yogin*, aiming at *sambodhi* or *kevala-jñāna*, i.e. perfect knowledge, or *ātma-jñāna*, i.e. self-knowledge. He traces the outward form of a *dhyāna-yogin* in the figures on the Indus valley seals. After an interval of about three millenniums this outward form appears in the Buddhist images of Mathurā and Gandhāra which, however, could not catch the inner spirit of this process of *dhyāna*. It was left to the Gupta artists who first succeeded "in giving full expression to the spiritual vision of the *dhyāna-yogin*." It was first achieved in the Bodhisattva image from Bodhgayā in which an inner spiritual experience is found to have been explicitly rendered in the entire physiognomy of the body as well as of the face. In this particular example showing a disciplined body and conquered mind the image reaches its true spiritual level. "The Bodhisattva image from Bodhgayā," Kramrisch rightly says, "is the first image in India which by its form signifies what its name implies."<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the principal theme of the plastic art of this epoch is concerned chiefly with the rendering of this spiritual experience through the representation of a disciplined body and a conquered mind, and this is true not only of the images of Bodhisattva or Buddha, but of other divinities as well. This spiritual experience is perhaps the same which the Western scholars call 'intellectualism' in Gupta art, and this, combined with its refined finish and execution, constitutes its supreme excellence.

The Bodhgayā image, referred to above, represents a happy



and successful integration of the stolid dignity of the Kushāṇa idiom with the restrained grace and inner spiritualism of the Gupta. The heavy stolidity of the fourth century gradually sheds off its stiffness and toughness in the fifth when the new idiom reaches its apogee. The image now acquires an easy and reposeful attitude born, no doubt, of an inner peace resulting from the conquest of the mind, already achieved and taken for granted. Plastically, a soft and delicate modelling with easy and flowing contours and melting planes leads to a beauty of definition as well as to a spirit of calm and peaceful contemplation. With a smooth and luminous body, seemingly weightless in existence, the image appears to breathe the enjoyment of supreme bliss arising out of an inner serenity of the mind. Sārnāth where the Buddha preached his first sermon (literally 'turned the Wheel of Law') was the most active centre of this new idiom and remarkable specimens of sculptures from this hallowed site supply a noble commentary of gradual advance of the new aesthetic vision. Such image as the Bodhgayā Bodhisattva, evidently affiliated to the Mathurā tradition, supplied the prototype to the artists of Sārnāth, as certain works of early date (c. fourth century A.D.) clearly demonstrate. Yet, as Kramrisch rightly says, "the Sārnāth version of the Mathurā prototype is subtler than the original."<sup>7</sup> Scholars are agreed that in the Sārnāth images of the fifth century a greater delicacy of execution, along with a sensitive treatment of the seemingly weightless body and an intensity of expression emphasising a spirit of calm and reposeful peace, must be regarded as an independent contribution.

The Sārnāth idiom becomes acknowledged even beyond the confines of that school and its influence is clear and explicit in other centres of artistic pursuits as well. Mathurā, though it could not entirely shake off the heaviness and volume or the static attitude, characteristic of its earlier works, also feels the elegant impulse of the refined Sārnāth trend. In spite however of this mutual interaction, a definite distinction may be recognised between the products of the two schools. The main fact of this distinction lies, apart from minor details, in the effect and appearance produced by the images of each school. In spite of a plastic refinement and appearance of spiritual absorption, the image at Mathurā remains statuesque in its own dignity, while



that at Sārnāth with its slender and sensitive treatment of the body, carried almost to a point of exaggeration, seems to soar above in the supreme enjoyment of its own blissful experience.

Sārnāth introduces not only a delicacy and refinement of form, but also a relaxed attitude in respect of stance and of the disposition of the hands. The left hand, previously clenched to hip, gradually descends downward and holds artistically the hem of the outer garment, while the right arm, originally raised to shoulders, descends forward with the palm and fingers full of grace, elegantly disposed in *abhaya-mudrā*. Such a mode in the disposition of the hands does away with the harsh angles at the elbows, a feature reminiscent of the Kushāṇa idiom, and thereby introduces a pose of ease and significant gesture. The rigidity of the stiff and erect *samapada-sthānaka* attitude is also done away with. The Buddha of Sārnāth of this period does not stand quite erect. "The median line", to quote Ramaprasad Chanda, "instead of being perpendicular and dividing the body into two exactly equal halves, bends into a graceful curve by the inclination of the torso to one side and throwing the weight of the body on one leg, so that one hip is slightly higher than the other." The other leg is slightly bent at the knee, as if for a forward step. This breaking of the body slightly on its own axis results in a graceful and relaxed attitude and imparts to the form a certain litheness and movement, in contrast to the columnar rigidity of similar Mathurā works. Even in case of the seated figure, the slender physiognomy carries itself a notion of movement, unearthly in its bearing. The Sārnāth artist transforms the drapery into a completely transparent sheath for the body closely following the modelling in all its subtle nuances. The folds have been discarded altogether; an indication of the drapery survives only in the thin lines on the body suggesting the edges of the garment. The sides that fall apart are given, again, a flimsy muslin-like texture. The body in its smooth and shining plasticity constitutes the principal theme of the Sārnāth artists, and combined with this beauty of definition, which resolves the form into the purest plastic essence, there is the spirit of calm and peaceful contemplation, aloof from all worldly stirrings and allurements. This integration of form and spirit Marshall des-



cribes as one of "the greatest contributions which India has made to world's art."<sup>8</sup>

The influence of Sārnāth made itself felt in Eastern India. The Prāchyas, or the peoples of the East, seem to have been ethnically different from those of Madhyadeśa and to have culture strains essentially of a divergent character. Temperamentally the Easterners are an emotional people, and at Pāhārpur (Rājshāhi district, North Bengal, East Pakistan) at a later period certain stone sculptures and terracotta plaques are found to be imbued with a great warmth of emotion. The reliefs on the pillars from Chandimau<sup>9</sup> (Bihar) are, likewise, distinguished by a vivacious emotion. Such sculptures possibly indicate the pre-existence, in this part of the country, of an indigenous art tradition which, while being swayed by the soft and sweet melody of the classicism of Sārnāth, leaves its own impress on the contemporary art of Eastern India in an emotional appeal of a certain delicacy. Kramrisch describes this as the eastern version of the classical idiom of Sārnāth.<sup>10</sup> It is characterised by an emotional feeling which even the sublimity of the Sārnāth inspiration fails to suppress. There is, at the same time, a subtle change in plastic content and the figures acquire thereby a sensuous import, hardly to be expected in the spiritual and impersonal creations of Sārnāth.

Several sculptures from different parts of Eastern India fully illustrate this eastern trend in its emotional and sensuous bearing in a greater or lesser degree. Such sculptures are found to be distributed over a wide area, from Bihar in the west to Assam in the east,<sup>11</sup> roughly the Prāchya or Pūrvadeśa of the ancient Indian authors. Notable examples of this trend may be found in the colossal copper image of Buddha from Sultānganj (Bhāgalpur district, Bihar, now in the Birmingham Art Gallery), the stucco figures, especially the figure of Nāginī, round the circular brick structure at Rājagṛha (Rājgir, Bihar), known as Maniyār Maṭh, in the reliefs on the pillars from Chandimau (Bhāgalpur district, Bihar), already mentioned, several sculptures discovered from different parts of Bengal, and in the carvings on the door-frame from Dah Parvatiyā (Darrang district, Assam). Their link with the Sārnāth idiom is obvious, plastically as well as ideologically; yet, the emotionalism of the eastern trend is equally evident, sometimes in a clearly pronounced manner, at other times with a lesser



emphasis. The eastern version of the Gupta classical trend endows the sublimate of Sārnāth with an emotional feeling and sensuous charm which are essentially human and belong to this world. Here one may recognise a tradition, local and indigenous in inspiration, which, swayed by the Gupta classical ideal, produces an idiom, homelier and more human in character, when compared to the highly intellectual bearing of Sārnāth.

Among the sculptures of the Gupta period found in Bengal mention should first be made of a standing image of Buddha, discovered from Bihārail (Rājshāhī district, North Bengal, East Pakistan) and deposited in the Museum of the Varendra Research Society, Rājshāhī. It may be definitely dated in the early fifth century A.D. on stylistic considerations. It is executed in Chunār sandstone, the distinctive medium of Sārnāth, and the type resembles the contemporary images from that sacred site. Had not the findspot been correctly recorded, one might have mistaken it as a product of that famous school. The emotional note, though to a certain extent subdued, is apparent, as in the copper image from Sultānganj, in the deeper shadows round the eyes, the nostrils and the mouth. The image is sadly mutilated. Feet and right forearm, palm of the left hand and a greater portion of the halo are missing. Whatever is preserved shows the Master standing with his weight resting on the left leg and the right bent at the knee. This easier attitude, combined with a slight, almost imperceptible, inclination of the torso, endows the figure with a certain kind of poise, and balance, as well as a sense of movement. The diaphanous robe, covering both the shoulders, falls a little below the knees, hiding, yet at the same time revealing, the smooth and subtle modelling of the whole body. Though nose and lips are partly mutilated, a spirit of calm and peaceful contemplation, the spirit of *dhyāna-yoga*, is stamped in every feature of the face with its half-downcast eyes fixed to the tip of the nose. The eyelids, again, are perfectly petal-shaped. Conventional curls with the *ushnīsha* crown the head. The whole figure is well modelled and well proportioned, and every feature is clearly and smoothly defined. There is a refined delicacy in the treatment of the torso and of the abdomen. The legs, too, are no exception. In the majority of the figures of the period the legs are, more or less, summarily executed. This particular sculpture from Bengal is,

FIG. 5



perhaps, one of the few rare instances where we find them quite naturalistically modelled, and the flowing linearism of the lower part of the figure endows it with an ease and grace hardly to be found in other contemporary sculptures, those of Sārnāth even not excepted. This factor attributes no mean credit to the local artist who carved out this beautiful image.

If the emotional trait of the eastern trend is, to a certain extent, subdued in the rendering of the Buddha image from Bihārail, it is emphatically evident in the two images of Sūrya, one discovered from Kāśīpur (Twenty-four Parganas district, West Bengal) and the other from Deorā (Bogra district, North Bengal, East Pakistan). Both the images are executed in a kind of bluish basalt. The two represent an almost identical conception and in stylistic and physiognomical form also the two are related to each other. In the former, now preserved in the Asutosh Museum of Indian Art, Calcutta University, the god stands on a high pedestal which shows seven horses, galloping to right, and a wheel, in side view, to left. The pedestal is thus intended to represent the Sun-chariot, the upper frame of which conceals the feet and, partly, the lower portion of the figure of the god. The bottom of the pedestal shows two flying figures, perhaps *gaṇas* or demons of darkness receding at the approach of the god. The upper frame is embellished by niches and *chaitya*-window designs. Over the pedestal, in front of the god, sits the charioteer Aruṇa with his body partly hidden, his left hand gathering up the reins of the horses and the right holding a lash. The two hands of the god hold each a lotus stalk with three blossoms. The dress, a skirt, is tied round the waist by a rope-like girdle with a floral clasp in front, while a short sword is seen hanging along the left side held by a diagonal strap. The upper part of the body is bare and a beaded collar adorns the neck. A flat-topped *kirīṭa* tops the head which is framed by a circular aureole. On either side the god was flanked by two attendant figurines, now missing entirely except for the lower portion of the one to the right. The physiognomical form, sturdy and heavy, is expressive of a latent energy that wells up from within.

The second figure, now preserved in the Museum of the Varendra Research Society, Rājshāhī, exhibits an almost identical composition. The deity is standing with a circular halo round the

FIG. 8

FIG. 9



head and carries lotus blossoms held by the stalk in each hand; the right forearm is, however, missing. He is attended on each side by a male and a female figure. In the pot-bellied male figure to the right of the god one may recognise Piṅgala (not bearded as in the later images), while that to the left carrying a staff is apparently Daṇḍī, the two being recognised in the iconographic texts as attendant divinities associated with the Sun god. Two female figures on two sides are seen discharging arrows and are to be identified respectively as Ushā and Pratyushā. The god has for his ornaments a *kiriṭa* crown with a flat top, a short collar, apparently of beads, and a pair of bracelets. He wears boots which are partially hidden. The god is clad in a short skirt tied round the waist by a girdle clasped in front. Along his left side is seen a sword hanging from a diagonal strap, while a scarf passes round the waist and is knotted to right with the ends gracefully arranged. The circular halo of the god is fringed by a beaded border while a similar halo frames the head of each of the attendant divinities, Daṇḍī and Piṅgala, who wear similar dress and ornaments. In front of the god is seated the charioteer Aruṇa. The wheel of the chariot as well as the seven horses are depicted on the pedestal, the former in the centre with the figure of a horse in front flanked by three other figures of horses on either side.

If we compare these two images of the Sun god with those of probably Kushāṇa date (Chapter II) it is apparent that the iconography of the god, as seen in actual images, has undergone certain development. The latter series had only two attendants, namely Daṇḍī and Piṅgala; and the horses of Sun-chariot had been shown in only one instance. But in the images under consideration we find, besides the horses, the single wheel (cf. *ekachakram* of the *dhyāna*) of the Sun-chariot, the charioteer Aruṇa seated in front, and Ushā and Pratyushā shooting arrows. The last figures can be seen in the Deorā image only, but it is not impossible to infer from the composition that they existed also in the Kāśīpur specimen, but are now missing. It should also be noted that the sacred thread, so prominent in later images of Sūrya, and the figures of the two consorts and of Mahāśvetā, almost invariably associated with Sūrya in images of the god belonging to the Pāla period, are not depicted in the present images. These images correspond significantly with the following description of Sūrya,



given in the *Matsya-purāṇa*, Chapter 261, verses 1-8:

*Prabhākarasya pratimām=idānīm śṛṇuta dvijāḥ |*  
*Rathasthaṃ kārayed=devaṃ padma-hastaṃ sulochanam ||*  
*Saptāśaṃ ch=aikachakrañ=cha rathaṃ tasya prakalpayet |*  
*Mukuteṇa vichitreṇa padma-garbha-sama-prabham ||*  
*Nānābharāṇa-bhūṣhābhyāṃ bhujābhyāṃ dhṛita-pushkaram |*  
*Skandhasthe pushkare dve tu līlay=aiva dhṛite sadā ||*  
*Cholakchchhana-vapushaṃ kvachich=chitreshu darśayet |*  
*Vastra-yugma-sam=opetaṃ charaṇau tejas=āvṛitau ||*  
*Pratīhārau cha kartavyau pārsvayor=Daṇḍi-Piṅgalau |*  
*Kartavyau khaḍga-hastau tau pārsvayoh purushāv=ubhau ||*  
*Lekhanī-kṛita-hastañ=cha pārsve Dhātāram=avyayam |*  
*Nānādevagacir=yuktam=evaṃ kuryād=Divākaram ||*  
*Aruṇaḥ sārathiś=ch=āsya padmini-patra-sannibhaḥ |*  
*Āsvau suvalaya-grīvāv=antasthau tasya pārsvayoh ||*  
*Bhujāṅga-rajjubhir=baddhāḥ saptāśva-raśmi-samyutān |*  
*Padmasthaṃ vāhanasthaṃ vā padma-hastaṃ prakalpayet ||*

In point of style and execution these images appear to date in the sixth century A.D., having a general resemblance with those of the panels in the Daśāvatāra temple at Deogarh (Jhānsi district, Uttar Pradesh). The prominent *trivali* marks, the paucity of ornaments, the strict simplicity of design are characteristically in Gupta idiom. The long wig-like hairs falling on the shoulders and the arrangement and knot of the scarves, passing round the waists, are also in characteristically Gupta fashion (cf Deogarh panels and the stucco reliefs of Maniyār Maṭha). The circular halo with only a beaded border appears to be but a plain reminiscence of the exquisitely decorated halos of the Sārnāth Buddhas. The deep shadows below the eyes and round the lips emphasise the emotionalism of the full round face. In physiognomical form each reveals a certain sensuous grace. In the image from Deorā the sturdiness of the torso has been relieved, to a certain extent, by a more softened, but detailed, modelling which, however, leads to a weakness in regard to aesthetic conception.

FIG. 7 Another relic of definitely Gupta workmanship is a gold-plated bronze image of Mañjuśrī which now forms one of the precious possessions of the Museum of the Varendra Research Society, Rājshāhī. It comes from a mound, known as Balāi Dhāp,



close to the ruins of Mahāsthān (Bogra district, North Bengal, East Pakistan), the site of the ancient city of Puṇḍravardhana. The figure is in the round and represents a standing male figure with two hands, the right, which was found a few years after the discovery of the image, hanging down in *varada-mudrā* (gesture of granting boon) and the left raised up in *vitarka* (gesture of exposition). The figure has matted hair tied in a knot over the head and falling in wavy locks over the shoulders and breasts. In front of the matted tiara (*jaṭā-mukuta*) there is the miniature effigy of Dhyānī Buddha Akshobhya, the spiritual father of Mañjuśrī, with whom the figure has apparently to be identified. The god wears a *dhoti*, tied round the waist below the navel by a double-stringed girdle. In front, the *dhoti* is gathered in a long plait which hangs down between the legs in wavy curls reaching as far as the ankles. The upper part of the body is partly covered by a scarf (*uttariya*) that passes diagonally from the left shoulder across the front and below the right arm-pits. The sacred thread hangs down also in a wavy manner. The ears are decorated with plain tops and the eyes are inlaid with silver. The pupils are well marked. The *trivali* marks on the neck are very prominent and the face is made fleshy and roundish in appearance with an emphatically thick lower lip. The emotionalism of the eastern version of the Gupta classical trend is evident in every line and feature of the image. Pointed finger tips are bent backward as in the copper image of Buddha from Sultānganj. The whole figure is exquisitely modelled, not excluding even the feet, and has a simple naturalism about it for which one looks in vain in later sculptures. The close-fitting dress and the general style are characteristic of Gupta workmanship. The paucity of ornaments is remarkable and, as pointed out by N. G. Majumdar in connection with a note on the image,<sup>12</sup> presents a great contrast to the inordinate taste for over-ornamentation and complexity of design which became prominent factors in all artistic attempts of the later period. The image, on these grounds, cannot be ascribed to a date later than the sixth century A.D.

Some discussion as regards the process of manufacture of bronze and metal images will not, it is believed, be out of place here. Bronze is technically known in Indian *Śilpaśāstras* as *aṣṭa-dhātu* (a composition of eight metals) for which N. K.



Bhattasali had coined the term 'octo-alloy'. In this composition we have copper, tin, lead, antimony, zinc, iron, gold and silver in varying proportions. Copper was evidently the chief ingredient and the last two, the two valuable metals gold and silver, were either absent or their proportions were quite insignificant. Images wholly cast in brass or silver are also known from Bengal, but in the later periods. Sometimes, as in the present specimen, the bronze images were plated over with a thin coating of gold, and many later images show sockets in which jewels were once set. In this way no amount of wealth or labour was spared to make the images rich and beautiful with a view to increasing the religious merit of the donors concerned.

The method employed in casting bronze or metal images must have been something akin to what is known in the west as *cire perdue* or 'lost-wax' process. A text belonging to the category of the *Śilpaśāstras*,<sup>13</sup> quoted by O.C. Gangoly in his *South Indian Bronzes*, asserts that metal images are made from wax. The Indian Śilpa texts occasionally describe the mode of casting metal images by the lost-wax process. Apparently the mode was followed throughout India. This mode is still practised by the artists of Nepal which, according to the Tibetan historian Tāranātha, derived the art of metal sculptures from the Eastern school said to have been founded by Dhīmaṇ and Bitpāla. The details of the mode, as communicated by Bhikhuraj, the owner of an image factory in Nepal, have been described by N. G. Majumdar<sup>14</sup> and may be mentioned here. The first stage in casting is the preparation of the wax model of the image to be manufactured, described in the Śilpa texts as *madhuchchhishṭa-vidhāna*. The object to be cast is first modelled in wax, and the wax model is next wrapped in thick coatings of soft clay applied in several layers. When sufficiently dry, few more coatings of clay mixed with husk are again applied over it. When dry again, the wax model is melted away by the application of heat and molten metal amalgam is poured in the vacuum left in the mould. After the amalgam has set and cooled, the clay mould is removed. The figure is next chased and chiselled for the final finish.

The process, described above, is identical with the one which the *Vishṇu Saṃhitā*, as quoted by T. A. G. Gopinath Rao,<sup>15</sup> generally lays down for the making of metal images. A more elabo-



rate account of this process<sup>16</sup> occurs in the *Abhilashitārtha-chintāmaṇi* or *Mānasollāsa*, said to have been composed by King Someśvara Bhūloka-malla of the Western Chālukya dynasty who reigned in the first half of the twelfth century A.D. This process is eminently suitable for the making of solid images in metal, as we generally have in South India and Ceylon. In Bengal, however, as it appears from the inner core of non-metallic substances like charred husk in the present gold-plated image as well as in another image of Śrī or Lakshmī, about three centuries later in date, from Bogra and now in the Museum of the Varendra Research Society, Rājshāhī, some kind of hollow-casting seems to have been practised. The colossal copper image of Buddha from Sultānganj also shows similar inner stuffing. The technique, described above, cannot explain the existence of a non-metallic inner core, for which apparently a somewhat modified process was adopted. It appears that the wax model was worked over and around an inner stump of husk and other combinations. For a close parallel in the present day mention may be made of the straw core used in making clay images in Bengal. The stump remained within the mould when the wax was melted out. The molten amalgam found its way in the crevices between the inner stump and the sides of the mould, encasing the stump all around. The non-metallic substances, like husk, etc., assumed a charred form, blackish colour and sufficient hardness in the process of casting.

The present image of Mañjuśrī from Mahāsthān is, again, particularly interesting on account of its being plated all over with gold. The gold-plating, thinner even than an egg shell, has peeled off in a good many places, but sufficient traces still remain to prove that the image must have been a great beauty in its original shape and form.

Gilt bronze images are well known in the Lamaistic school of Tibet and also in Nepal. In India, too, they are not quite rare. Traces of gilding have been found in a few of the bronzes from Nālandā. From Kurkihār, near Gayā, there have been found several gold-plated bronze images of the early Pāla period; they are now deposited in the Patna Museum. From Bengal at least two other gilt bronze images have been found up till now. One of them, an image of Sarvāṇī, dedicated by Prabhāvatī, queen of Devakhaḍga of the Khaḍga dynasty of East Bengal (c. seventh



century A.D.), was found near Chaudhagrām in the district of Tipperah. The second is the image of Śrī, just referred to above.

It appears, therefore, that the gilding of metal images was by no means uncommon in the history of early Bengal bronzes. The present image from Mahāsthān is, certainly, the earliest known gilt bronze image in Eastern India. We do not know whether any such image of a still earlier date has come to light in any other part of India. To one it may seem curious how such a fine plating, thinner even than an egg shell, was produced in those ancient days in a manner that it sticks to the surface even after the lapse of so many centuries. It will not be out of place, I believe, if I quote again Majumdar<sup>17</sup> who, on the information of Bhikhuraj, describes the traditional, but crude, method of gilding metal images still practised by the Newari artists of the present day. "On the chiselled smooth surface of the image they apply a preparation of mercury and then a quasi-liquid paint, of which the chief ingredients are gold dust and mercury. Finally the image is heated in cowdung fire." It appears that mercury evaporates in the process of heating leaving an even deposit fine gold all over the image.<sup>18</sup> The plating is complete and it sticks permanently to the surface of the image.

Besides the sculptures now fixed to the basement wall of the great temple at Pāhārpur (Rājshāhī district, North Bengal, East Pakistan), which should be discussed separately, the above, namely the Bihārail image of Buddha, the Mahāsthān image of Mañjuśrī and the two images of Sūrya, respectively from Kāśīpur and Deorā, are all that we know of Gupta sculptures in Bengal. All these exhibit the sublime spiritualism of the Sārnāth school combined with the emotionalism of its eastern version in a greater or lesser degree. The majority hail from North Bengal, roughly the Puṇḍravardhana-*bhukti* of those times, which has been conspicuous for bringing to light more than half a dozen copper-plate grants of the fifth and sixth centuries A.D. Copper-plate inscriptions of the sixth century A.D. have also come to light from different sites in West and East Bengal. It may be presumed, hence, that other sculptures of such date and style may also turn up on proper explorations of the earlier sites in these regions. A miniature stone image of Siṃhavāhinī (Durgā) from Pokharnā<sup>19</sup> (Bankurā district, West Bengal)—Pushkaraṇā of the Susunia



inscription of Chandravarman of *circa* fourth century A.D.—and now in the collection of the Asutosh Museum of Indian Art, Calcutta University, has been described to be Gupta by such experts as Stella Kramrisch and Ramaprasad Chanda. The image in question is, however, too hopelessly mutilated to yield any definite basis for ascertaining its date or its artistic merit.

A rare image in greyish black stone, representing Vishṇu seated on the outstretched wings of his vehicle, the Garuḍa and exhibiting peculiar features in respect of the form and disposition of the attributes held by the hands, is now being worshipped at Lakshankāṭi in the district of Backergunge (East Bengal). N. K. Bhattasali describes it as “a very old piece of sculpture” which can “safely be ascribed to the pre-Pāla period.”<sup>20</sup> If the present author is not wrong, there is, further, an indirect hint as to its belonging to the Gupta period. But stylistic and other considerations, for example, the rectangular stela bordered with half-lotus designs, facial and bodily treatment, the sensitive bends of the slim and slender fingers as they hold the attributes, the rather high and ornamental crown (*kirita*), the conventional mode of depicting the *vanamālā* and the *upavīta*, all recall characteristics of the obvious Pāla idiom, and the image can, possibly on no account, be dated earlier than the ninth century A.D.

Though not strictly coming under the term Gupta which, as a culture epoch, is usually taken to cover a period from the fourth to the sixth centuries A.D., two other images, which may be definitely assigned to the seventh, should also be mentioned here. Both the images are in octo-alloy and have been unearthed together from Chaudhagrām in the district of Tipperah (East Bengal). The first is an image of an eight-handed goddess, designated as Sarvāṇī, to which reference has already been made above. According to the inscription which it bears it was covered with leaves of gold (i.e., gilt) under the patronage of Queen Prabhāvatī, wife of king Devakhaḍga. Devakhaḍga belonged to the Khadga dynasty and is known from inscriptions, found at Āshrafpur in the Dacca district (East Bengal), as well as the account of the Chinese traveller, I-tsing, to have been ruling in the latter half of the seventh century A.D. These images thus possess the unique advantage of being dated with a certain amount of precision which very few of the Bengal sculptures seldom do. The first image<sup>21</sup>



shows the eight-handed goddess standing erect on the back of her mount, a couchant lion, between two female attendants on two sides, each holding a fly-whisk. She holds discus, sword, arrow and conchshell in her right hands beginning from the top, and shield, bow, trident and bell in the left in the same order. Bhattasali quotes a *dhyāna* from the *Śāradātilaka-tantra* and the image corresponds to this description in every particular. The second image,<sup>22</sup> which is now in the Dacca Museum, is a miniature, about six inches in height. It represents Sūrya, seated cross-legged on his chariot drawn by seven spirited horses. In his two hands he holds a pair of lotuses. To the right of the god is seated Piṅgala with a short beard, and to his left is seen Daṇḍī in a similar attitude, while at the extreme ends of the chariot stand Ushā and Pratyushā shooting arrows. In respect of iconographic composition the present image closely corresponds to the two images of Sūrya, described above, except that the present specimen represents the god in a seated attitude which is rather rare.

FIG. 6

Another metal image, hailing from Manir Tat<sup>23</sup> in the Twenty-four Parganas district (West Bengal), also apparently belongs to this phase. It shows a god standing in *samapada-sthānaka* on a lotus over a rectangular pedestal which has the figure of the bull, the distinctive mount of Śiva, on one side. On the pedestal is placed the *triśūla* (trident), again a characteristic emblem of Śiva, over which the left hand of the god seems to have been placed. The right hand is held downwards, but the palm is broken away. Apparently it was held in *varada-mudrā*. The god wears sparse jewellery and is distinguished by *ūrdhva-liṅga* and *jaṭā-mukuta* which bears the crescent moon on one side. The head is framed by an oval aureole, decorated at the edges, which is placed over a horizontal frame of two struts supporting a lintel. The top of the aureole is broken away. The form, though abridged, is characterised by a smooth and flowing contour which otherwise relieves the stiffness of the erect pose. That the figure is of the god Śiva admits of no doubt. The bull mount, the trident, the *jaṭā* with the crescent, the *ūrdhva-liṅga* all point to that direction. This two-handed form corresponds to the 'Hara' aspect of the god of which we have a description in the *Hayasīrsha Pañcharātra*.<sup>24</sup> A similar representation of this aspect may be recognised in one of the stone sculptures at Pāhārpur to be described later. In composition and



style the Manir Tat metal image reveals significant links with the two Chaudhagrām images, described above, and is, in all likelihood, co-eval with them in date. The stone image of Vishṇu from Kākadighi<sup>25</sup> (Dinājpur district, North Bengal), presenting identical features in stylistic form and composition of the stela, may also belong to the same date or to a period slightly later.

Coming between the Gupta and the Pāla schools of art the above images, as is naturally to be expected, represent in some manner the transition from the former to the latter. Even in the best days of classical art the abstraction of the Sārnāth idiom had been less intensely felt in Eastern India. The eastern version of the classical idiom, distinguished by a certain amount of sensuousness and emotionalism, may be said to have its moorings on this earth, and in the seventh century A. D. with the decline of the Gupta classical ideal the regional trends and tendencies gradually began to prevail and assert over the classical. Elsewhere<sup>26</sup> the present author has discussed how after the disintegration of the Gupta empire, especially after Harshavardhana, a conscious regional outlook came to be clearly manifested in every sphere of Indian activity. In the field of art this regional outlook led to the growth of the provincial schools, among which the Pāla school of art, with its zone in Bengal and Bihar, is one of the most remarkable. As the other provincial schools, the Pāla school of art had its foundations on the classical heritage, swayed and transformed by the regional factors that seem to have been long in operation. The above images of the seventh century, in respect of plastic form and content, clearly mark a stage in the transition from the Gupta to the Pāla. A particular group of Pāhārpur sculptures reveal also in a certain degree the advance towards the Pāla idiom of art. These sculptures will be discussed in detail in later chapters. To confine our observations to the images described above, we find in the stiff and erect Sarvāṇī a likely antecedent of the conventional Pāla image. The surrounding rim to which the hands of the goddess and other ill-fitting decorative devices serve as struts anticipates the stela composition of Pāla sculpture. The Śiva image from Manir Tat as well as the Vishṇu from Kākadighi foreshadow also the composition of the conventional type of Pāla images. The Sūrya image with its composite elements of attendants, charioteer, horses, etc. represents not a very distant



approach to the full-fledged stela composition of Pāla art. Some critics may condemn a Pāla sculpture as being stiff, rigid and conventional. But one should not forget that the more rigid lines of the main figure in the composition seem to be consciously contrasted with the flowing rhythm of the attendant figures, the vigour of the animal mount and of the decorative motifs. This characteristic of Pāla art is even now conspicuous in these seventh century images in which the rhythmic flexions of the female attendants in the image of Sarvāṇī, the vigour and spirited attitudes of Ushā and Pratyushā and of the horses in the Sūrya image offer pleasing contrasts to the stiff attitudes of the main deities, one standing perpendicularly erect in rigid *śamapada-sthānaka* and the other seated in clear *paryāṅka-bandha*. What later on came to be known as the Pāla type of image is clearly reflected in the images under notice, but as the term Pāla would be an anachronism they should be better termed as pre-Pāla.

#### REFERENCES

1. For detailed characteristics of the Bodhisattva type of Mathurā reference may be made to A. K. Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, pp. 57-58, figs. 79, 83-85; also S. K. Saraswati, *Survey of Indian Sculpture*, figs. 50, 33.
2. Stella Kramrisch, *Indian Sculpture*, p. 41.
3. *A.S.R.*, 1929-30, pp. 215-21; *Mediaeval Indian Sculpture in the British Museum*, pp. 11 ff.
4. S. K. Saraswati, *loc. cit.*, pp. 120-31.
5. Alexander Cunningham, *Mahabodhi*, p. 53, pl. XXXV; *A.S.R.*, 1922-23, p. 149, pl. XXXVII. a. Cunningham is inclined to refer the date to the Śaka era, while Chanda (*A.S.R.*, 1922-23) would like to assign it to the Gupta.
6. Stella Kramrisch, *loc. cit.*, p. 61.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
8. John Marshall, *Guide to Sanchi*, p. 20.
9. *A.S.R.*, 1911-12, pp. 161-66, pls. LXXIII-LXXV.
10. Stella Kramrisch, *loc. cit.*, p. 67.
11. S. K. Saraswati, *loc. cit.*, pp. 141-43.
12. *Modern Review*, Vol. XL, 1926, p. 426.
13. *Lohajāṃ sakalaṃ yat=tu madhuchchhisṭena nirmitam |*
14. *Modern Review*, Vol. XL, 1926, p. 426.
15. *Lohe Sikthamayim=archchhām kārayitvā mṛid=āṇṛitam |*  
*Suvarṇ=ādini saṃśodhya vidrāvy=āṅgāra-vapunaḥ | |*  
*Kuśalāiḥ kārayed=yatnāt sampūrṇaṃ sarvato ghaṇam | |*



- T. A. G. Gopinath Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, Vol. I, pt. 1, p. 51.  
 16. In *J.I.S.O.A.*, Vol. IV, 1936, pp. 139 f. the author had published a detailed note on this text along with an English translation. The text may be reproduced here for a comparison of the ancient mode with that still in practice now.

Navatāla-pramāṇena lakṣaṇena samanvitām |  
 Pratimāṃ kārayet pūrvam=udilena vichakṣaṇaḥ | |  
 Sarv=āvayava-sampūrṇaṃ kiñchit pitāṃ drīṣoḥ priyām |  
 Yath=oktair=āyudhair=yuktāṃ bāhubhiś=chṛ yath=oditaiḥ | |  
 Tat-prishṭha-skandhadeśe cha krikātyāṃ makule'thavā |  
 Hemapushpanibhaṃ dirghaṃ nālakaṃ madan=odhbhavam | |  
 Sthāpayitvā tataś=ārchāṃ limpet saṃskṛitayā mṛidā |  
 Maṣṭhīm tushamayiṃ kṛitvā kārṇāsaṃ śataśaḥ kshatam | |  
 Lavaṇaṃ chūrṇitaṃ ślakṣhaṇaṃ svalpaṃ saṃyojayen=mṛidā |  
 Peshayet sarvam=ekatre suślakṣhe cha śīlātale | |  
 Vāra-trayaṃ tad=āvartya tena limpet samantataḥ |  
 Svachchhaḥ syāt prathamō lepaḥ chhāyāyāṃ kṛita-śoshanaḥ | |  
 Dina-dvaya vyatīte tu dvitīyaḥ syāt=tataḥ punaḥ |  
 Tasmin-chchhushke tṛtīyas=tu nivīdo lepa ishyate | |  
 Nālakasya mukhaṃ tyaktvā sarvam=ālepayen-mṛidā |  
 Śoshayet=tat prayatnena yuktibhir=buddhimān=naraḥ | |  
 Sikthakaṃ tolayed=ādau archchā-lagnaṃ vichakṣaṇaḥ |  
 Rītyā tāmreṇa raupeyēṇa hemnā vā kārayet=tataḥ | |  
 Sikthād=daśa-guṇaṃ tāmraṃ rīti-dravyaṃ cha kalpayet |  
 Rajataṃ dvādaśa-guṇaṃ hemaḥ syat shoḍaś=ottaram | |  
 Mṛidā samवेशṭayed=dravyaṃ yad=ishṭaṃ kanak=ādīkam |  
 Nāliker=ākṛitiṃ mūṣhāṃ pūrvavat pariśoshayet | |  
 Vahnau pratāpya tām=archchāṃ sikthāṃ nihsārayet=tātaḥ |  
 Mūṣhāṃ pratāpayet paśchāt pāvakaḥ=ochchhishṭa-vahninā | |  
 Rītiś=tāmraṃ cha rasatāṃ nav=āṅgārair-vrajed=dhruvam |  
 Tapt=āṅgārair-vinikṣiptai rajataṃ rasatāṃ vrajat | |  
 Suvarṇaṃ rasatāṃ yāti pañchakṛitvaḥ pradīpitaiḥ |  
 Mūṣha-mūrdhaṇi nirmāya randhraṃ lauha-śālākayā |  
 Saṃdamśena driḍhaṃ dhṛitvā taptāṃ mūṣhāṃ samuddharet | |  
 Tapt=archchā-nālakasy=āsyē vartim prajvalitāṃ nyaset |  
 Saṃdamśena dhṛitāṃ mūṣhāṃ namayitvā prayatnataḥ |  
 Rasaṃ tu nālakasy=āsyē kshiped=achchhinna-dhārayā | |  
 Nālak=ānana-paryantaṃ sampūrya viramet=tataḥ |  
 Sphoṭayet=tu samīpasthaṃ pāvakaṃ tāpa-śāntaye | |  
 Śīlatatvaṃ cha yātāyāṃ pratimāyāṃ svabhāvataḥ |  
 Sphoṭayen=mṛittikāṃ dagdhāṃ vidagdho laghu-hastakaḥ | |  
 Tato dravya-mayī s=archchā yathā madana-nirmitā |  
 Jāyate tādrīṣī sākṣhād=āṅg=opāṅg-opaśobhitā | |  
 Yatra kvāpy=adhikaṃ paśyech=chāraṇais=tat-praśāntaye |  
 Nālakaṃ chhedayech=ch=āpi paśchād=ujjvalatāṃ nayet | |



*Anena vidhinā samyag=vidhāy=ārchchām śubhe tithau |*  
*Vidhivat=tām pratishṭhāpya pūjayet pratyaham kramāt | |*  
*Abhilashitārtha Chintāmaṇi, Chap. 1, verses 77-97.*

17. *Modern Review*, Vol. XL, 1926, p. 427.
18. While in Nepal in 1956 the author had the opportunity of witnessing the actual working of this process conducted by Shyamlal Sinnya, a Newari artist of Lalitpur (Patan).
19. H. K. Mukhopadhyaya, Pokharṇā, *Udayana*, 1340 B.S., p. 214.
20. N. K. Bhattasali, *Iconography of Buddhist and Brahmanical Sculptures in the Dacca Museum*, p. 87, pl. XXXII.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 204, pl. LXX; J. C. French, *Art of the Pāla Empire of Bengal*, p. 3, pl. II; R. D. Banerji, *Eastern Indian School of Mediaeval Sculpture*, pl. I. c.
22. N. K. Bhattasali, *loc. cit.*, p. 172, pl. LIX.
23. S. K. Saraswati, *loc. cit.*, fig. 127.
24. *Trisūla-dhṛik tathā vāme varado dakṣiṇena tu |*  
*Dvibhujo'yaṁ Haraḥ sākṣāt sarvakāmaphala-pradaḥ | |*  
*Hayasirsha Pañcharātra* (Ms. in S. K. Roy's collection), I, Chap. 29.
25. S. K. Saraswati in *J.P.A.S.B.*, Vol. XXVIII, pp. 178-79, pl. 7, fig. 1.
26. S. K. Saraswati, *Survey of Indian Sculpture*, pp. 149-51.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### PĀHĀRPUR SCULPTURES: A REVIEW

The Excavations at Pāhārpur (Rājshāhī district, North Bengal, East Pakistan) have yielded a valuable mass of materials for the archaeologist and the antiquarian. To the historian of Bengal art they have supplied invaluable data with regard to the existence of a flourishing period of plastic activity in Bengal before the Pāla school of art took its rise. The lower part of what now appears to be the basement wall of the main temple is decorated with stone sculptures of no ordinary merit. These sculptures, numbering sixty-three in all, are generally in a tolerably fair state of preservation owing their protection to the accumulation of silt and debris around the basement of the temple. They are extraordinarily varied from the stylistic point of view as well as from the point of view of subject matter. Almost without exception, they belong to the Brahmanical pantheon. The series includes some of the earliest known artistic representations of the boyhood exploits of divine Kṛishṇa and, if we are to believe K. N. Dikshit, the earliest known image of Kṛishṇa and Rādhā. The images of Balarāma, Yamunā, etc., may be regarded as noteworthy productions of the art of Pāhārpur. Besides, among these sculptures we have the figures of *dikpālas*—Indra, Agni, Yama(?) and Kubera, of Śiva and Gaṇeśa, of Bṛihaspati, the preceptor of the gods, of Chandra, Manu, etc. and of *dvāra-pālas*, dancers, and so on. We can recognise further representations of a few of the scenes from the Hindu epics, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. Thus, by their wide variety the Pāhārpur sculptures are of great interest to, and worthy of careful study by, a student of Bengal history.

Some scholars would think that at Pāhārpur we have “a vigorous school of sculpture, already differentiated from Gupta art and foreshadowing the characteristics of Pāla art.”<sup>1</sup> The sculptures, as we have just observed, are so extraordinarily varied that they are bound to puzzle any student of art history, and extreme caution is necessary when making any definite statement regard-



ing them. The theory of a school of sculpture "differentiated from Gupta art and foreshadowing the characteristics of Pāla art" may not be true of all the sculptures at Pāhārpur. It is obvious, as we shall presently see, that in some of the sculptures the Gupta tradition, in what Kramrisch recognises as its eastern version, was followed. Dikshit describes this class as representing the traditions of later Gupta sculpture, i.e., a provincial manifestation of the great Gupta art.<sup>2</sup> But there are also others, and these form the majority, which form a distinct group that may be said to be quite separate from Gupta art. This, on a careful study, may be proved to have represented an indigenous trend in the art of Pāhārpur. According to Dikshit this group shows "a distinct original tendency in which one may recognise the beginnings of the Bengal school which afterwards flowered into the exuberant Pāla school."<sup>3</sup> But this, by itself, cannot be said to have given rise to Pāla art, and there is, again, another group which may be said to be intermediate to, and perhaps a compromise between, the Gupta and the indigenous trends. It is this group which may be known to have represented not a very distant approach to the Pāla school of art. Of course, it is very difficult to say, before one studies the details, whether these groups were removed from one another by differences in time. These sculptures are not only varied in quality and style, but exhibit also great contrasts in workmanship. One has to exercise extreme caution, hence, when dating a particular sculpture or sculptures, especially when in the absence of any epigraphic or palaeographic data one has to depend solely on the testimony of style.

R. D. Banerji and K. N. Dikshit are of the opinion that the sculptures on the face of the walls of the main temple at Pāhārpur are "one and all attributable to the same early period as the original construction of the temple," which they fixed as the sixth century A.D. The main fabric of the temple belongs to a single period of construction, most likely to the time of Dharmapāla who was responsible for the foundation of the monastery around it about the close of the eighth century A. D. or the beginning of the ninth. Standing in the centre of the monastic quadrangle, the temple was evidently an essential part of the monastic scheme and must have been laid out and erected simultaneously with the monastery. Dikshit has subsequently revised his former opinion



with regard to the date of the temple and now attributes its construction to the period of Dharmapāla. In regard to style, workmanship and quality we have already tentatively observed that the sculptures on the basement wall of the temple exhibit three distinct groups. The following study and analysis of these three groups of sculptures will amply bear out this division. In this study we will distinguish them as the first, the second (i.e., the intermediate) and the third groups. It is only after such an analysis has been made that we can discuss fruitfully the question of their chronology.

The first group of sculptures at Pāhārpur are represented by a few specimens only and they exhibit the following characteristics:

The bodily forms, though generally heavy, shows a soft and tender modelling and a refinement and delicacy of features. It is only in the so-called Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa(?) sculpture (No. 22) that we find slender body types. In case of the male figure we usually find the broad chest smoothly gliding down to a narrow waist, whence in its downward course the line again bulges a little at the hips and gradually flows down to the pedestal in a soft and sensuous modelling of the legs. The bulging breasts and hips and the soft and graceful folds of the belly in case of the female figure add to the beauty of the female form. In linear scheme we have always a smooth and gliding rhythm which gives an impression of soft elasticity and pliability all through. The features are well defined and the forms well proportioned. The face is generally broad, sometimes with the pointed chin. The eyebrows, indicated only by faint lines melting on the forehead, meet at the root of the nose in a descending curve. Pupils are well marked and in case of the Śiva figure (No. 37) the eyeballs are marked by shallow circles. The mouth is generally well modelled and is crescent-shaped except for a downward stroke in the centre of the lips. The chin is broad and at times heavy (Śivaite panel, No. 13; Yamunā, No. 23), though the pointed chin may be recognised in the image of Balarāma (No. 24) and in the Rādhā-kṛṣṇa(?) panel (No. 22). There are always the *trivali* marks on the neck, and the navel, as a rule, is always indicated. A slight bulge of the belly below the navel is also a pleasing feature and may be recognised in some of the sculptures.

The hair is usually tied in a knot above the head. In the

FIG. 10

FIG. 12

FIGS. 14,  
13

FIGS. 11,  
10



- FIG. 10 Rādhā-Kṛishṇa(?) panel it falls in curls at the back and at the sides. The clothing is represented as fitting tightly to the persons of the men, in which case it reaches only to the knees, while that of women is loose and reaches to the ankles. The upper part of the body, whether of the male or of the female, is bare, except in one solitary instance where we find one of the ladies in the Śivaite panel (No. 13) provided with a *kucha-paṭṭa* (breast-band). The drapery is diaphanous, but the diaphanous effect is sometimes, to a certain extent, subdued by close parallel folds, for example, in the Rādhā-Kṛishṇa(?) panel (No. 22) and in the image of Yamunā (No. 23). In spite of the folds, however, the diaphaneity is apparent as the drapery, clinging fast to the body, corresponds to every minute modelling of it. An almost similar arrangement of the folds of the drapery may be recognised in a Sāñchī sculpture, at one time crowning a Gupta pillar at that sacred site.<sup>4</sup>

The ornaments are simple and in good taste. We find generally a pair of ear pendants, one collar, a pair each of armlets and bracelets, a girdle and a pair of anklets, the last only in the female figures. There is thus no overcrowding of ornaments as one is accustomed to see in the later sculptures.

Plastically too, this group of sculptures at Pāhārpur exhibit charming features. The naivete, suavity and massiveness are all enlinked and synthetised into pleasing specimens of art which appear to be nearer to those of the best days of Gupta classical idiom. The drawing of the figures is generally spirited and the attitude is not only easy but graceful and the expression dignified. The smooth and gliding linear effect is also remarkable. The full round breasts and the bulging hips of the female figures do not affect at all the soft flowing line. Kālidāsa, the classical poet, mentions these features among the many enchanting charms of female beauty and how nicely do we find these idealistic conceptions given plastic forms in stone. There is no over-ornamentation, no complexity of design. The beauty of the sculptured form is set against a plain background with only a decorated framework fringing the niche, and is embellished by a few but elegant ornaments. In these sculptures the refined sensuousness of the eastern trend of the Gupta classical idiom is found to be fully valid together with a certain abstraction derived from the Sārnāth trend. The smooth and suave contours define in each case a



physiognomical form, undoubtedly sensitive in modelling, but not exactly in the manner of Sārnāth. In these respects and in point of general execution and treatment this group of Pāhārpur sculptures is not far removed from the stucco reliefs of Maniyār Maṭha (Rājagriha), or from the Sūrya images from Kāśīpur and Deorā, or from Mahāsthān Mañjuśrī, described above, and cannot have been separated from them by a great gap of time.

The second group of Pāhārpur sculptures, which consists of some fifteen specimens, is marked by a comparative heaviness all through. The bodily forms are usually flabby and distended. A certain definition of features is evidently there, but there is not the same refinement and delicacy as in the first group of sculptures. In form and proportion, too, these sculptures fail to reach the standard of the first. Again, one misses in this group the gliding linear rhythm of the first, and at times the line seems to be sharply broken. Though the sculptures are sometimes marked by lively actions and movements (cf. the panel showing Kṛishṇa and Balarāma fighting with Chānūra and Mushtika, No. 31), in case of the simple standing figure there may be noticed a straightening and stiffening of the attitude, and the legs, with slight or no modelling, look more like columns supporting a rather heavy torso. In most of the specimens the face is broad and, not unoften, heavy. The eyebrows are more strongly curved, and in a majority of cases incised lines above give them a modelled effect. The shape of the mouth remains unchanged, but in a few instances the downward stroke in the centre of the lips has been done away with, with the result that the mouth is perfectly crescent-shaped (Indra, No. 29). In one instance, again, (Śiva, No. 40) there is rather a distortion of the mouth and the eyes. The folds of the neck and of the belly, where there are any, are more or less schematic. The drapery, too, is a little heavy and usually the ornaments are rather coarse.

Next we come to the third group consisting by far of the largest number of sculptures. The figures are exceptionally heavy with neither the proportion nor the definition of form. In case of the single standing figures, which happily are not too many, the legs are perfect columns supporting in each case a rather heavy bust. The hands too look like staffs with arms and palms distorted to an extent. The execution and modelling are coarse and crude in the extreme. The features invariably are too harshly modelled and

FIG. 15

FIG. 22

FIG. 25



FIG. 35

there is little or no attempt at all at transitional planes. Instead of the graceful and naturalistic folds of the belly, which we notice in the first and sometimes in the second group of sculptures, we have in this group extremely crude and schematic lines (Gaṇeśa, No. 5; Amorous couple, No. 11). The smooth and gliding linear rhythm is altogether lacking. The eyes are bulging and the mouth is perfectly crescent-shaped. The heavy drapery hangs down completely covering the body underneath or, in a majority of instances, we find on each figure a close-fitting garment, which looks like a pair of shorts, clinging fast to the waist and the thighs. Instead of the elegant girdles and ornaments and pleasing decorative designs that we see in the first group of sculptures, we have in the third crude and heavy imitations of the same. Quite surprisingly however, these sculptures are almost invariably distinguished by the most lively action and naturalistic and unsophisticated expression.

Such a grouping as the above is unmistakable in the Pāhārpur sculptures, and in view of this varied contrast in workmanship and artistic quality it is difficult to hold that all of them belong to a single period. The principal argument of Dikshit's theory of a single period of execution for the sculptures<sup>5</sup> is that the general ground plan of the basement wall, to which the sculptures are attached, shows uniform features and refers to a single period of construction. The scheme of embellishment of this basement wall with sculptured stone panels should thus, in his opinion, refer to the same epoch. The argument has, no doubt, a certain force. But still it is difficult to ignore the great variety in style and workmanship which the sculptures betray.

A discussion as to the distribution of stone sculptures around the basement wall is likely to bring out interesting facts that may explain the existence of sculptures of divergent styles and workmanship, and very likely of different periods, in a monument the main fabric of which certainly belongs to a single period construction. The great diversity in the styles of the sculptures, their apparent separation in point of chronology, and the fact that they do not always fit in with their respective niches are sure to lead to serious doubts whether the sculptures, that are now seen around the basement, were all fixed at one single period according to a well-ordered scheme. A mere glance at the sketch



plan of the distribution of the sculptures, given by Dikshit,<sup>6</sup> will at once show that they occupy niches, placed at irregular intervals, that can in no way reflect the original scheme of decoration. The uniform plan of the basement and of the upper terraces should leave no doubt as to the fact that the original decorative scheme must have been conceived in a logical and well-ordered manner. A detailed analysis of the distribution of sculptures around the basement will, however, readily bring out glaring irregularities that are incongruous with the uniform plan and arrangement of the temple. For instance, the northern half of the basement has only twenty-two niches filled with sculptures, while the southern half has as many as forty-one. The western half shows only twenty-five, but the eastern half as many as thirty-eight. Such irregularities are also clear in the disposition of the sculptures between the arms of the cross, namely, seven in the north-west sector, eleven in the north-east, twenty in the south-east and eleven in the south-west. One may expect some kind of symmetry and regularity in the decoration of the main walls at the three cardinal points (excepting the north which has the main staircase); but here too similar discrepancies appear, namely, four each in the eastern and western walls and six in the southern. One is practically lost in the midst of such irregularities.

A still closer analysis, however, reveals the fact that it is only the projecting angles that are invariably provided with sculptured niches on both faces. There are as many as twenty projecting angles and leaving aside the two front corners, just on either side of the main staircase on the north, it is interesting to note that all the eighteen others exhibit on both faces niches bearing sculptures, except however at the southern end of the main western wall. Our official reports are deficient in the sense that, in spite of the seriousness that one should naturally attach to this omission, they do not clearly record whether such an instance is really an omission or due to the fact that the sculpture has been missing from its place. When we notice that it is this particular side which has suffered most from damage the latter alternative might not have been improbable.

It may be presumed, therefore, that according to the original scheme of decoration it is only the projecting angles that had been provided with sculptures on both faces. But the niches intermediate



between the angular projections, as we find them now, are most unequally distributed, there being no intermediate niche in the north-western sector, and only four each in the north-eastern and south-western, while they occur most frequently in the south-eastern. Dikshīt has tried to explain this clear irregularity by attributing the comparative absence of intermediate niches in the northern half of the monument to the absence of direct sun light in the north and to the limited number of available stone reliefs.<sup>7</sup> None of these explanations, however, seems to be satisfactory. The former fails to explain the obvious irregularity in the distribution of the sculptures in the sectors between the arms of the cross. No two sectors had been evenly and equally distributed. Moreover, absence of decoration on a particular side or sector of a temple due to absence of sun light in that direction is also unknown in the entire range of Indian architecture. The alternative suggestion admits the fact that the sculptures were not all executed at one period according to the needs of a decorative scheme following a uniform plan, but had been collected and gathered, in all probability, from the earlier edifices in the neighbourhood. Again, if all the sculptures that one sees now had been available at the time of the construction of the Pāhārpur temple one would naturally expect a better and more even distribution of them around the basement walls of the monument.

The foregoing analysis leads to the evident conclusion that the intermediate niches and sculptures, whether on the main walls or between the projecting angles, did not form part of the original plan, which admits of stone sculptures only at the angular projections, one on each face, as *pieces de accent*. Such an inference gains further strength when one finds that the sculptures in these projections are almost always of approximately the same height corresponding to the height of the plinth, executed in the same kind of material, pertain to the popular narrative themes (having hardly any cult significance), and belong to a popular idiom of art, quite distinguished from the classical and hieratic, but intimately related to the vast number of terracottas—undoubtedly part of the original decorative scheme—stylistically as well as iconographically. These sculptures, assignable to a period not earlier than the eighth century A. D., primarily as binding the corners of this stupendous brick monument, come in the logic of a



well-planned decorative arrangement, and the construction of the monument in all its essential elements during the period of Dharmapāla may safely be postulated. The intermediate niches mostly fitted in sculptures pertaining to the Brahmanical faith, appear to have been provided for in later times to accommodate sculptures, as gathered from the earlier monuments at the site or in the neighbourhood. When one takes into consideration the eclectic nature of the Pāhārpur establishment in the later phases of its existence the subsequent fixing up of Brahmanical sculptures on the walls of the temple, avowedly belonging to a Buddhist establishment, might be attributed to the followers of the Brahmanical faith who had already begun to frequent and even reside within the establishment.<sup>8</sup> During the long life of the Pāhārpur monastery, necessitating successive periods of repairs and renovations, it is only reasonable to apprehend that the existing niches were more than once disturbed and that even new ones were added. This may account for some, but only a few, sculptures of the second group now appearing at the corners, pieces that can be definitely recognised as belonging to the corners now filling up the intermediate niches, or reliefs belonging to the basement decoration being picked up from the upper levels of the monastic cells.

The above discussion would reasonably demonstrate that there is no improbability of sculptures of different periods now forming part of the decoration of the basement of a temple the main fabric of which belongs to a single period of construction. The different groups of sculptures are not only varied in respect of style and workmanship, but it is also interesting to note that each distinct group has its own distinct material which has been used in the majority of the sculptures of that particular group; for example, grey sandstone in the first, a kind of bluish basalt in the second and black basalt in the third. This fact also lends support to the suggestion that sculptures of the different groups belonged to different periods.

Kramrisch, possibly having in view the wide diversity in style, was at first in favour of a grouping of the Pāhārpur sculptures into three different periods.<sup>9</sup> She has, however, changed her opinion and now thinks that the sculptured panels on the basement wall of the Pāhārpur temple are one and all to be relegated



to the same period, the seventh century A. D. She would now attribute the divergences in style to different trends or traditions. Thus she writes: "The stone panels from Paharpur, North Bengal, belong to two traditions—the one, numerically in the minority, is an eastern and provincial version of contemporary sculpture in Madhyadeśa, but the other is an undiluted and indigenous eastern Indian contribution. Significantly enough, the latter is mainly employed in showing events from the life of Kṛishṇa and other animated scenes and figures. But when divinities are represented in *samapadasthānaka* a hybrid compromise between the tradition of Gupta sculpture of Madhyadeśa and Bengali form is arrived at. From these the cult images of the Pāla and Sena school take beginning."<sup>10</sup>

It is evident from the above extract that Kramrisch also agrees in recognising three distinct groups among the Pāhārpur sculptures. Her 'eastern and provincial version of contemporary sculpture in Madhyadeśa' is, no doubt, represented by what we have designated above as the first group, and the indigenous tradition by the third. The second group, which is stylistically midway between the first and the third, represents the 'hybrid compromise' between the two traditions. It is quite possible, as Kramrisch thinks, that two different trends, two different traditions might have been at work at Pāhārpur. No two groups of sculptures can possibly be the products of the same hand or of the same tradition. At least, the first and the third groups are so widely apart that the very idea is next to an absurdity. The first group, we have already observed, was nearer to the heyday of Gupta art, and the term Gupta in its eastern version, both in style and spirit, appears to be an apt classification for this group of sculptures. For the very coarse works, almost primitive and childish, the term indigenous or folk trend would be a suitable description. Bengal is the land of potters and here we have, so to say, the potter's art in the medium of stone. In stone though, it is terracotta in style. We may also agree with Kramrisch in her observations about the second group, her 'hybrid compromise,' giving rise to the Pāla and Sena school of art.

Explaining the diversity in style and workmanship in the art of Pāhārpur as the result of different traditions Kramrisch assigns all the sculptures to the same age of production. In this



it is difficult to agree with her. All these three groups could not possibly have been the works of the same period. The theory of different traditions alone fails to explain several factors, which we shall presently see, and it is better to recognise, along with different trends, different periods in the art of Pāhārpur.

Technically the second and the third groups of sculptures at Pāhārpur, in spite of their belonging to different trends, appear to be the successors of the first group with much of its purity and delicacy of design gradually disappearing and ultimately dissolving in course of ages. When we analyse the three groups we cannot but notice a gradual deterioration and ultimate extinction of the secret of finer and smoother modelling and of other Gupta features that we recognise in the first group, such as the soft and gliding linear rhythm, inner spiritualism, beautiful and naturalistic folds of the neck and of the belly, elegant decorative designs, carvings, and ornaments, etc., in the second and also in the third. In view of these, the inference that these distinct groups were also differentiated chronologically appears to be the more probable. In that case we may propose the following chronology for the Pāhārpur sculptures—sixth century for the first group, seventh for the second and eighth for the third. It is possible that the first and the second groups belong to the same epoch, namely the seventh century A. D. In that case it is not difficult to explain the distinction in style and workmanship, one being the eastern Indian version of the Gupta classical trend and the second as emerging out of a contact of the indigenous trend with the classical and evolving a form, which though evincing a little technical deterioration, the indigenous artists being no good technicians, are sometimes endowed with lively action and expression, when there is any opportunity for such. This appears to be the distinct indigenous contribution to the art of Pāhārpur. It can be inferred from the third group, which can on no account be dated earlier than the eighth century A. D., that an indigenous art tradition prevailed in Bengal in the earlier phases too, and this indigenous art, primarily an art of action, coming into touch with the Gupta classical trend, evolved the second group of sculptures at Pāhārpur. But spell-bound as the indigenous artists were by the technical perfection and the spirit of all-pervading calmness of the Gupta tradition, either contemporary or slightly earlier, the



art of action got a check and a compromise between the Gupta and the indigenous trends gave rise to independent images, stiff and conventional, which by far constitute the majority of sculptures of the second group, and from which we may trace the beginnings of the stiff, erect and conventional cult images of the Pāla period.

In this second group of Pāhārpur sculptures the plastic traits of the Gupta classical norm are found much subdued and the sensuous import of the eastern trend generalised and rarified to a certain extent. Even if contemporary with the sculptures of the first group, they present an idiom that is essentially different. In this second group of Pāhārpur sculptures there is hardly anything left of the plasticity and lyricism of the Gupta classical norm. The refined sensuousness of the eastern version is also evident only in a generalised manner. These sculptures imply a style, far removed from the Gupta classical trend and from its eastern version as well, but are nearer to what came to be known as the Pāla with the rise to power of this dynasty in Eastern India in the eighth century A. D. In plastic content, as well as in import and iconography, they may be justly regarded as the precursors of the conventional Pāla images of the subsequent days. These Pāhārpur sculptures of the second group along with such specimens as the Chauddagrām metal images of Sarvāṇī and Sūrya, the bronze image of Śiva from Manir Tat, the Kākadighi Viṣṇu, etc. signify a gradual movement that ultimately leads to the emergence of the Pāla school of sculpture. The connection of this intermediate group of sculptures at Pāhārpur with the Gupta is evident, in spite of the modifications that have taken place. At the same time an impact of the popular indigenous idiom is noticeable in a general heaviness and coarseness of plastic texture. The popular indigenous idiom represents an art of dynamic action, while the Gupta classical norm that of calm and contemplative repose. It is the meeting of two opposing ideals in the sphere of art that ultimately leads to the creation of the hieratic Pāla school.

The third group of Pāhārpur sculptures represents a genuine and undiluted indigenous tradition, as Kramrisch very correctly observes. The very fact that it remains free from the caressing touch of the Gupta classical norm bespeaks for it a later date



when the all-pervading spell of Gupta art had been totally spent up. The sculptures of this group fully illustrate the strength and vitality of this autochthonous art idiom along with its dynamic and emotional content. This idiom seems to represent an art of the people, naive and vivacious in an extreme measure. Though the execution is crude and coarse, the lively and powerful compositions are of supreme aesthetic and social significance. Unaffected by any sophistication, this art is truly human in its appeal and seems to have deeper roots. Seldom has such an idiom found expression in stone. The proper vehicle of such an idiom must certainly have been terracotta that had been a popular medium of artistic expression with the common folk since a hoary past. The long dados of terracotta plaques adorning the walls of this colossal temple illustrate in an abundant manner the working of this popular and autochthonous art idiom in terracotta, and the third group of stone sculptures at Pāhārpur appears to constitute a parallel projection of this popular tradition in a costlier medium. It is true, the terracotta plaques and stone images of this group do not belong to the phase under discussion, but are contemporaneous with the date of the temple which was erected in the time of Dharmapāla sometime about the close of the eighth century or the beginning of the ninth. But they presuppose certainly earlier practices in this popular idiom, specimens of which are not extant now. It is also regrettable that in the subsequent Pāla and Sena school this popular idiom was given but little scope, but it survives in the terracotta decoration of the temples of Bengal of the Muslim period and may be traced as late as the nineteenth century in Bengal scroll paintings and illustrated book covers.

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2. K. N. Dikshit, *Paharpur*, p. 37.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
4. John Marshall, *Guide to Sanchi*, p. 98, pl. X. b.
5. *A.S.R.*, 1927-28, p. 38.
6. K. N. Dikshit, *loc. cit.*, Ground Plan of Main temple.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 9.



8. The majority of the monastic cells, which originally were meant for residential purposes, exhibit in the uppermost levels, i.e. in the later phases of occupation, ornate pedestals on which there occasionally remain *in situ* Brahmanical sculptures, thereby proving adequately that in the later periods the followers of the Brahmanical faith had already begun to frequent the establishment.
9. Stella Kramrisch, *Pāla and Sena Sculpture* (*Rupam*, No. 40, p. 108).
10. Stella Kramrisch, *Indian Sculpture*, p. 216.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### PĀHĀRPUR SCULPTURES: FIRST GROUP

In the following three chapters we shall describe the more important of the Pāhārpur sculptures,<sup>1</sup> group by group, with particular emphasis on their themes and iconography.

One of the most eminent productions in the first group may be seen in a charming and finely executed panel (No. 22) in the eastern wall of the basement showing an amatory couple who have been described by K. N. Dikshit as Kṛishṇa and Rādhā.<sup>2</sup> We find here two figures, a male and a female, standing side by side, each with legs crossed and clasping the other with one of the hands. The left hand of the male figure is placed in front of the breast in what looks like *abhaya-mudrā*, while the right hand of the female hangs down as in *varada-mudrā*. According to Dikshit the attitude of the hands of the pair, one pointing upwards and the other downwards, has the mystic significance of the union of heaven and earth. A sort of wig-like arrangement of the hair of the male figure is of particular interest. The parallel folds of the drapery are also worth mentioning. The right leg of the female figure appears distorted, yet the easy and graceful pose, combined with an elegant and restrained dignity, is evident. A shy, but happy, smile has also been superbly delineated on the beautiful oval face of the female figure. Slender bodily types, coupled with an elegance and definition of modelling, endow the figures with a certain kind of animation.

FIG. 10

There are several other amatory couples depicted at Pāhārpur. But this particular representation differs from them in the dignified restraint of each of the couple, and their divinity is indicated by a halo, shown round the head of each. There are, however, no definite data to identify the pair in the panel as Kṛishṇa and Rādhā. From the above features indicating divinity, from the frequency of the depiction of Kṛishṇaite scenes in Pāhārpur art and from its position in the same wall that contains the figures of Balarāma and Yamunā, Dikshit's interpretation



may appear to be a probable one which, if correct, would give us perhaps the first plastic representation of a motif, so common and abundant in the neo-Vaishṇavite art of Bengal.

In judging the question we should, however, note that Rādhā's association with Kṛishṇa appears to be a rather late feature in Kṛishṇa myth. Her name and her relations with Kṛishṇa have hardly been mentioned in the epics and the Purāṇas. The *Mahābhārata* does nowhere mention Kṛishṇa's questionable relations with Rādhā or with any of the *gopīs* (milkmaids). In the *Salyaparvan* Duryodhana, after his thigh was broken, vilifies Kṛishṇa. In the *Sabhā-parvan* Śiśupāla reviles him. But both of them have nothing to say against Kṛishṇa's character or his amours with the *gopīs*, even in vilification. It is thus reasonable to think that this feature, the amorous element of the Kṛishṇa myth, was not known when the *Mahābhārata* reached its present shape. The *Harivaṃśa* is perhaps the earliest work to treat systematically the life and exploits of Kṛishṇa. It describes Kṛishṇa's love for the *gopīs* and their dances in the moon-lit autumn night. But even in such scenes the name of Rādhā has nowhere been mentioned. The description of Kṛishṇa's dance with the *gopīs* is more elaborate in the *Brahma-purāṇa* as well as in the *Vishṇu-purāṇa*, but in neither of these does the name Rādhā occur. The *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* is admitted to be an authoritative work in pre- or even post-Chaitanya Vaishṇavism, and in this work, too, though the amours of Kṛishṇa with the *gopīs* are fully described, the name of Rādhā or of any individual girl is significantly absent. S. Sen<sup>3</sup> of Calcutta University draws our attention to several verses in the Prākṛit anthology, the *Gāthā Saptaśatī* of Hāla, which have for their theme the amours of Kṛishṇa with Rādhā and other *gopīs*. The date of this anthology is still a matter of dispute, and even if an early date be attributed to it, the relevant verses do not appear to prove that Rādhā was anything more than one of the many *gopīs*, only a slight preference being shown to her by the individual mention of her name. The *Dhvanyāloka* of Ānandavardhana quotes two verses<sup>4</sup> which refer to Rādhā as a principal *gopī* in connection with the description of Kṛishṇa's amours. The author flourished about the first half of the ninth century A.D. and the verses are apparently of an earlier date, but how much earlier it is difficult to ascertain. Probably these verses belong to a period when the



Rādhā element was just making its appearance in the Kṛishṇa myth. In the *Brahmavaivarta-purāṇa*, which is definitely a late work, we find Rādhā as a premier *gopī*, and in Jayadeva's work Rādhā as the supreme *gopī* is already an well-established figure.

According to the generally accepted opinion the two epics and the principal Purāṇas reached their present forms in the Gupta and post-Gupta periods. From the absence of any information about Rādhā in the *Mahābhārata* and in the principal Purāṇas, it appears that the Rādhā element in the Kṛishṇa legend was unknown, or only slightly known, in the period of which we are speaking and to which the Pāhārpur panel, identified as a representation of Kṛishṇa and Rādhā by Dikshit, is to be assigned. Though her name might have been known, she had not yet emerged as a principal *gopī*, much less the supreme one, not to say of her deification, which is certainly a much later growth. This inference appears to have some support from the almost contemporary works like the *Bṛihat Saṃhitā* and the *Vishṇudharmottaram*. Both the works mention one goddess, Ekānamśā by name, who is enjoined to be shown between Kṛishṇa and Balarāma.<sup>5</sup> The *Vishṇudharmottaram*<sup>6</sup> mentions further the figures of Rukmiṇī and Satyabhāmā in connection with the description of the image of Kṛishṇa. But no mention is made of the figure of Rādhā in the context of the image of Kṛishṇa, and it is only reasonable to assume from this omission that Rādhā, who later on put into shade Rukmiṇī and Satyabhāmā, the legally married wives of Kṛishṇa, had not yet grown to be important enough to be specially associated with the image of Kṛishṇa. Hence, if the amatory couple at Pāhārpur have anything to do with the Kṛishṇa legend it would be better to describe them either as Kṛishṇa and Rukmiṇī or as Kṛishṇa and Satyabhāmā.

A sculpture next to this panel, representing the river goddess Yamunā (No. 23), belongs also to the first group of sculptures at Pāhārpur. The goddess stands in three-quarter profile on her vehicle, the tortoise (*kūrma*), with her left hand to waist (*kaṭi-hastā*) and right holding a lotus flower with a goose perched on it. On two sides of the goddess we find two attendants, a male holding an umbrella over the head of the goddess and a female with a flower basket in her left hand, the right bearing something (perhaps a flower) which is missing. Both stand on what look like crabs.

FIG. 13



On the back slab may be seen another lotus plant with a pair of geese perched on the blossom. All the figures are gracefully posed and modelled, the female ones having their dresses marked by close horizontal folds. The face of the goddess is a little abraded and the heavy cheeks and chin mar a little the beauty of the full round face. The attendant lady to the left is, however, a perfect gem of art. Her graceful stoop, supple waist, slightly bulging hips and the sensitive folds of the belly convey rare charm and refined beauty that remind us of the stucco *nāginī* from Maniyār Maṭha or the Besnagar Gaṅgā. The sensuous and emotional import of the eastern trend is found to be fully valid in the plastic content of each figure in the group.

Independent cult images of the river goddesses Gaṅgā and Yamunā are very rare. In the Gupta period they invariably appear on both sides of the door-frame as guardian divinities protecting the entrance of the temple and as essential parts in the scheme of its decoration. Eminent sculptures of the two river goddesses belonging to the Gupta and post-Gupta periods have been discovered from different sites in Central India. Such sculptures have in all cases been found on the door jambs indicating the association of the goddesses with the temple door. In Eastern India mention has already been made of a door-frame from Dah Parvatiyā (Darrang district, Assam) showing two very elegant sculptures of the two goddesses on the two jambs.<sup>7</sup> In subsequent schools of art also it is the common practice to show the river goddesses on the two jambs of the door-frame, but their importance appears to have dwindled in the later ages.

The Yamunā relief at Pāhārpur does not seem to have formed part of a door jamb. Nor does it appear to have any cult significance. It occurs as a decorative element of the wall of the temple, very probably because of her association with the Kṛishṇa legend, to which not a few of the basement sculptures are affiliated. A verse in the *Agni-purāṇa*<sup>8</sup> prescribes water-pot as an attribute of Yamunā, and images with this attribute are fairly known. This particular relief follows the *Vishṇudharmottaram*<sup>9</sup> which enjoins the blue lotus as an attribute of the goddess. Lotus, either singly or in accompaniment with the water-pot, and garland may also be seen in a few known sculptures of the goddess. The significance of geese with Yamunā, as we find in the relief from Pāhārpur, is



difficult to explain. A similar occurrence may be recognised in the Dah Parvatiyā sculptures of the river goddesses,<sup>10</sup> already referred to.

A grey sandstone sculpture of Balarāma (No. 24) may also be stylistically placed in the first group of sculptures. In Hindu mythology Balarāma has a dual personality. As Saṅkarshaṇa, the elder brother of Kṛishṇa, he is one of the five holy Vṛishṇi heroes, and when the *vīra* concept develops into the *vyūha* he is one of the four *vyūha* manifestations of Vāsudeva-Vishṇu. Early texts, like the *Mahābhāshya* of Patañjali, and a few inscriptions of pre-Christian date<sup>11</sup> refer to the popularity of Saṅkarshaṇa in the *vīra* as well as the *vyūha* concepts. But images of such concepts are hardly extant now. In the later ages Balabhadra, Balarāma or Rāma is regarded as one of the incarnations (*vibhavas*) of Vishṇu. The extant images and the majority of the *dhyānas* found in the different texts refer to this second aspect of the god. A ploughshare (*hala*, *lāṅgala*, *sīra*) and a pestle (*musala*) are his distinctive emblems, from which he derives such names as Lāṅgalin, Haladhara, Halāyudha, Halapāṇi, Sīrapāṇi, Sīrāyudha, Sīrabhṛit, Sīrin, Musalāyudha, Musalapāṇi, Musalin, etc. He is also known as Rauhiṇeya (son of Rohiṇī), and the story is that he was conceived as the seventh son of Devakī, but for fear of Kāṁsa was transferred to the womb of Rohiṇī, another wife of Vasudeva. Both the two-handed and four-handed images of the god are spoken of in literature. In his two-handed representations he is to carry *musala* and *hala* respectively in the right and left hands (*dakṣiṇa-hastena musala-dharaṁ vāma-hastena hala-dharaṁ*).<sup>12</sup> These two, along with a canopy of snake-hoods, which mark him out as an incarnation of the mythical serpent Ananta or Śeṣha, as is found in some of the texts,<sup>13</sup> are the three main cognisances of the deity. In the descriptions of the four-handed specimens the *Agni-purāṇa*<sup>14</sup> adds *chakra* (discus) and *śaṅkha* (conch-shell), both distinctive emblems of Vishṇu. The *Hayaśirsha Pañcharātra*<sup>15</sup> has also a similar *dhyāna* which prescribes *lāṅgala*, *musala*, *śaṅkha* and *chakra* in the four hands of the god. As alternatives the same text substitutes *gadā* (mace) and *kṛipāṇa* (sword), or *gadā* and *padma* (lotus) for the conch-shell and the discus. Another description, again in the same text, omits *hala* and *musala* altogether and lays down that he is to have *śaṅkha*, *chakra*, *gadā* and *varada* (gift-bestowing gesture)

FIG. 11



in the four hands. These are the distinctive emblems of Vishṇu and it is interesting to note in this context that the texts enjoin that Vyūha-Saṅkarshṇa should hold the emblems of Vāsudeva-Vishṇu in his four hands according to the prescribed order. There is no doubt, hence, that the third *dhyāna* in the *Hayaśirsha Pañcharātra* describes the god in his *vyūha* aspect, and that the other descriptions in the same text and in the *Agni-purāṇa* represent composite images in which the two concepts of the god, *vyūha* and *vibhava*, have been combined. We should, however, note that *hala* and *musala* are the never-failing attributes in the images of Balarāma and the specimens, hitherto known, never shows any of the additional attributes that the *Agni-purāṇa* or the *Hayaśirsha Pañcharātra* speaks of. The extant images all belong to the *vibhava* aspect of the god.

According to the iconographic texts the complexion of the god should be white (*śvetābhaṃ—Vaikhānasāgama; śaṅkhendu-mṛiṇāla-gaura-tanuḥ—Bṛihat Saṃhitā*, chap. 57; *śvetaḥ—Vishṇu-dharmottaram*, III, chap. 85), and his garments either red (*rakta-vastra-dharaṃ—Vaikhānasāgama*) or blue (*nīla-vasanaḥ—Vishṇu-dharmottaram*).<sup>16</sup> Again, according to the *Bṛihat Saṃhitā* he should have his hair tied up in a knot above the head (*udbaddha-kuntalaṃ*). According to the epic and Purāṇic texts Balarāma was a hard drinker, and quite in keeping with such a character, both the *Bṛihat Saṃhitā* and the *Vishṇudharmottaram* say that his eyes should be rolling on account of excessive intoxication (*mada-vibhramalochanaḥ—Bṛihat Saṃhitā; mado'daṅchita-lochanaḥ—Vishṇudharmottaram*). Another interesting feature of the god, as mentioned in the *Bṛihat Saṃhitā* and the *Hayaśirsha Pañcharātra*, is that he should have only one *kuṇḍala* (ear-pendant) in one ear (*vibhrat-kuṇḍalam-ekaṃ—Bṛihat Saṃhitā; kuṇḍal-aika-vibhūshitah—Hayaśirsha Pañcharātra*).

In the image at Pāhārpur Balarāma stands on a plain pedestal with a slight and elegant bend, as may be recognised in the curve of the right hip. His head is surmounted by a seven-hooded snake canopy. On two sides may be seen two attendants, one male and the other female, the latter holding in her two hands a wine flask and a cup. The attributes in the hands of the male attendant cannot be recognised. The god has four hands, the upper right and left bearing respectively the pestle and the ploughshare, the



lower right the wine cup and the lower left resting on the waist. Indeed, as we have already observed, the pestle and the plough are the invariable emblems of Balarāma and no known specimen does show the additional hands bearing either the conch-shell and the discus, or the mace and the sword, nor does any of them show in the four hands the conchshell, the discus, the mace and the *varada*. A few of the known four-handed specimens of the image of the god may be cited here by way of comparison. There is a four-handed image of Balarāma at Osian<sup>17</sup> (Rājasthān) and there we find the additional hands bare. We know of two four-handed specimens in bronze, one from Kurkihār<sup>18</sup> in Gayā district and the other from Nālandā<sup>19</sup> in Patna district, both being dated in the reign of Devapāla. The Kurkihār specimen has one of the additional hands broken away (perhaps it carried a wine cup) and the other bears perhaps a sweetmeat. In the Nālandā specimen the additional hands hold a dish of sweetmeat and a wine cup. There is, again, a four-handed image of Balarāma in the Museum of the Varendra Research Society, Rājshāhī, assignable to about the eleventh century A. D. and here we find all the hands disposed in the same manner as in that at Pāhārpur. In the Pāhārpur image the god wears, besides the *dhōti* reaching to the knees and fastened to the waist by a girdle, a scarf passing diagonally across the waist with the frill gracefully hanging down and a belly-band (*udara-bandha*) knotted in front with the ends shown in artistic spirals. Though the attendant figures are a little crude, the smooth and refined execution and naturalistic modelling of the main figure distinguish the image as one of the elegant productions. The eyes, with drooping eyelids, signify meditation in singular contrast to the eyes rolling in intoxication, as prescribed in a few of the texts; but the wine cup held in one of the hands and the presence of a female attendant bearing wine flask and cup are sufficient testimonies to the epic and Purāṇic stories of the drinking orgies which the god is said to have indulged in. The god has his hair gathered up and with a knot in the middle the ends have been evenly and artistically arranged in curly rings. The arrangement of hair in a knot above the head appears to be the usual fashion in the Pāhārpur figures, but here the artist seems to have bestowed a special care on this feature, perhaps due to the prescription of the *Bṛihat Saṃhitā*. Another feature, not rare again



at Pāhārpur, is that the god has a prominent circular *kuṇḍala* in the right ear, but only a tiny ring, almost indistinguishable, in the left; this fact cannot but remind us of another iconographic injunction in respect of the image of Balarāma that he is to have a single *kuṇḍala* in one ear (*Bṛihat Saṃhitā* and *Hayaśirsha Pañcharātra*). It is possible that the artist was quite alive to this textual injunction, but being unable to explain this rather irregular feature and as a compromise between his sense of symmetry and fear of violating a śāstric injunction, he provided his god with so tiny a ring in the left ear that it is very likely to be missed, except on a close and minute observation. This is, however, a mere inference and cannot be much stressed upon, as two kinds of *kuṇḍalas* in the two ears appear to be the usual fashion in the Pāhārpur sculptures, the correct import of which is yet to come.

FIG. 12

Next we come to an image of god Śiva fixed to the southern basement wall of the temple (No. 37). The god stands upright (*samapada-sthānaka*) on a plain pedestal with a semi-circular projection in the middle. He has two hands; the left hand, hanging down, holds a water jar (*kamaṇḍalu*) and the right, raised to shoulders, a rosary (*aksha-mālā*). The matted hair (*jaṭā*) is tied in a knot above the head which is surrounded by a plain halo. A chain girdle, a short necklace of two courses of beads, a pair each of bracelets and earrings bedeck his person. A thin sacred thread dangles down across the torso. Otherwise, the whole body appears to be bare. The *ūrdhva-līṅga* (*penis erectus*), which is invariably present in all the Śiva images at Pāhārpur, has suffered partial mutilation. The face is rectangular with a broad chin. There is a third eye on the forehead, disposed vertically (*ūrdhvaṃ*), as particularly prescribed in the *Bṛihat Saṃhitā*,<sup>20</sup> and *trivali* marks on the neck. In physical type the figure is heavy. Yet, a soft and sensitive modelling with definitive features and a beatific expression of the face endow the figure with rare charm and elegance.

It should be noted here that *triśūla* (trident), *nāga* (snake), *ardha-chandra* or *indukalā* (crescent moon) on the head and the carrier *vṛisha* (bull), inevitably associated with the god Śiva, are absent in the present sculpture. Yet, the matted hair, the vertical third eye (distinctive of Śiva according to the *Bṛihat Saṃhitā*) and what remains of the *ūrdhva-līṅga* in the image are sufficient to indicate his identity. *Aksha-mālā* and *kamaṇḍalu*,



though not his distinctive and exclusive emblems, are also prescribed as his attributes in one or other of his varied forms. This is not the place to describe the development of the iconography of Śiva. That has been attempted by more than one scholar. I have not come by any text in the Purāṇas which may exactly explain this severely simple form of the god. The almost contemporary *Bṛihat Saṃhitā*, which admirably explains many of the peculiar features in Pāhārpur iconography, also fails in respect of this image. The *Vishṇudharmottaram* which, if not exactly contemporary, cannot have been much later than the period of this sculpture, gives a description of Śiva with five faces and ten hands under the general appellation of Mahādeva,<sup>21</sup> i.e. the great god. This general and all-pervading form, however, is made up of five aspects of the god, each distinguished by one face and two hands—known either as Sadyojāta, Vāmadeva, Aghora, Tatpurusha and Īśāna, or as Mahādeva, Bhairava, Nandivaktra, Umā-vaktra and Sadāśiva, each having his own set of attributes. Mahādeva, apart from the all-pervading form, is also one such aspect bearing *aksha-mālā* and *kamaṇḍalu*,<sup>22</sup> and the present image, exactly corresponding to this description, appears to be a separate representation of this Mahādeva aspect in art.

On the east wall may be seen, as one approaches the monument, a rectangular relief panel (No. 13) which shows Śiva standing in a group.<sup>23</sup> Śiva is seen to proper left of the panel, with a staff, having a broad knob at the top (described as *mayūra-chhatra* by Dikshit), in his right hand and a cup (?) in his left. His identity is certain from *ūrdhva-liṅga*, as he is always represented with at Pāhārpur. The staff with the broad knob at the top may be described better as a standard of peacock-tail- (*śikhi-pichchha-dhvaja* or *mayūra-paksha-dhvaja*) which is mentioned in the *Hari-vamśa*<sup>24</sup> as one of the attributes of the Devī. It is possible, hence, that Śiva, the consort of the Devī according to the usually accepted mythology, may also have a peacock-tail standard. In front of the god stands a lady with a cup in her left hand, while to her left stands another lady with her hands up and her waist clasped by a small figure. Three other figures (probably ascetics, as are to be surmised from the arrangement of the hair in each case), among which we may recognise that of the emaciated sage Bhṛīṅgī, appear to the proper right of the panel. On two sides of

FIG. 14



Śiva appear two dwarfish figures and on the background may be seen trees and foliage. The two ladies and Śiva wear sparse ornaments, and we find in each case a pair of earrings, one neck collar, a pair each of armlets and bracelets and a pair of anklets, the last only on the female figures. Compositions, similar to the principal motif in this panel, also occur on the facades of the early temples at Bhuvaneśvara, e.g. the Paraśurāmeśvara, etc. and also on temple No. IV at Barākar (Burdwan district, West Bengal).

C. L. Fabri<sup>25</sup> is right, I believe, when he describes the panel as representing the "mingling of good and poor quality". All the faces exhibit poor workmanship. The lips are not only thick, but also badly drawn. The eyes, too, are somewhat crudely executed. The left shoulder of Śiva is disproportionately large. But Fabri seems to be rather unjust in his statement that the legs are badly delineated. The legs and feet of Śiva and of the lady by his side are rendered quite naturalistically, while those of the second lady exhibit an extraordinarily flowing linear rhythm that can hardly be expected except in Gupta classical art. Both Fabri and Dikshit agree that the floral decorations on the left jamb together with the small attendant shown at the bottom are "in the best traditions of Gupta art". The designs and their drawing and carving are exquisite and compare favourably with the best specimens of the period, such as at Bhumārā, Ghārṇwā and Deogarh. "The very fine finish of the stone-cutting," says Fabri, "is in strong contrast to the rough sculpturing technique of the human figures, and the grace and harmony of the little swordsman in the fine arched niche are certainly most attractive."

Dikshit<sup>26</sup> identifies this panel as a representation of the episode of the offering of the poison, which came up as a result of the churning of the ocean, to Śiva and his drinking up of that poison, the episode that accounts for the origin of his name Nilakanṭha. Dikshit is supported by Fabri who quotes from the *Mahābhārata*<sup>27</sup> the theme of Śiva's drinking up of the poison, subsequent to the churning of the ocean. The female figure in the centre of the panel has been identified with Earth goddess by Dikshit and with Lakshmi by Fabri, who goes so far as to suggest indirectly that the stick with the broad knob in the hand of Śiva may represent the churning stick. The dwarfs on two sides of Śiva have been des-



cribed by Dikshit merely as attendants, while Fabri would recognise in them the *dānavas* (demons) in despair. Dikshit identifies the second female figure as Durgā, with the boy Kārtikeya, in great fear and excitement on account of her lord's taking such a great risk, and Fabri quietly agrees to this suggestion. The small figure clasping the waist of the second female figure seems, however, to be that of a young girl from portions of the *kucha-paṭṭa* (breast-band) still visible, and cannot be described as Kārtikeya.

The panel under discussion presents very little correspondence to the above theme, and it is difficult to say, hence, how far Dikshit and Fabri are correct in their interpretation of the sculpture. Moreover, when we scrutinise the details we come to recognise not too unimportant discrepancies and omissions which may lead to reasonable doubts regarding this identification. The *Mahābhārata* text, quoted by Fabri, gives us the generally current version of the story. In the churning of the ocean by the *devas* and the *asuras* for nectar one of the many things that came up was the deadly poison known as *kālakūṭa*. This was due to excessive churning which the snake king Vāsuki, who served as the churning rope, could not bear and the foam issuing out of the mouth of the tired serpent king accumulated as *kālakūṭa*. All the world fell into a swoon at the very scent of it and Śiva, at the request of Brahmā and other gods, drank up the poison which did not go beyond his neck. Poison stuck to his neck left a blue speck there and for this he came to be known as Nīlakaṇṭha. The *Matsya-purāṇa*,<sup>28</sup> too, gives a similar story of the churning of the ocean by the *devas* and the *asuras*. It graphically describes how *kālakūṭa* came out as a terrible mass of blue colour on the ocean, strong like fire, roaring like clouds, throwing off awful breath and enveloping all the *lokas* (worlds) by its cloud-like mass. Unable to bear its deadly impact and informed by *kālakūṭa* that either they should devour it or go to Śiva, the gods and the demons, headed by Brahmā and Viṣṇu, repaired to Śiva who, on the joint prayer of the gods and the demons, came down to the coast and quaffed *kālakūṭa* which stuck down to his throat. An almost identical version of the story is given in the *Śiva-purāṇa*.<sup>29</sup> The same Purāṇa elsewhere<sup>30</sup> gives us a different story which may be summarised thus: "On account of Śiva's severe austeri-



ties after the self-immolation of Satī, the whole world was on the point of being dried up. On the advice of Brahmā the gods, headed by Indra, offered to Śiva two vases, one containing nectar in the form of the moon, and the other containing poison. Śiva accepted the offer, first the vase of nectar which was transformed into the crescent-moon on his matted tiara, and next, the vase of poison, with which he anointed his neck. And thus did he come to be known as Chandra-śekhara and Nilakaṇṭha." We quite understand the offer of nectar in connection with Śiva's grim austerities and the consequent drying up of the whole creation. The offer was made apparently with the intention that when Śiva would bear it on his matted crown in the form of a crescent-moon that would have the effect of soothing the whole world. But the offer of poison in such a context cannot be satisfactorily explained, and it seems that the first version of the story—Śiva's drinking up of the poison brought forth in the churning of the ocean—was the generally accepted version of the miracle.

According to the story, then, we should reasonably expect at least Brahmā, Viṣṇu and the other gods in a representative narrative of this theme in art. But the four-faced god, not to say of the others, is significantly absent in the panel under notice. The miracle happened in connection with the churning of the ocean, and some suggestion of this context should be naturally expected in a proper delineation of the theme, but is conspicuously lacking. Again, we have nothing in the different versions of the story to connect the Earth goddess or any other goddess with the theme of the offering of poison to Śiva. Dikshit's identification of the two female figures in the panel as the Earth goddess and Durgā cannot be said to be anything but tentative. In view of these, it is difficult to lend support to Dikshit's interpretation of the panel the true import of which is still to be investigated. It may, however, be pointed out that the principal motif in the composition, a goddess offering something to Śiva from a cup, resembles the conception of the Devī as Annapūrṇā, a favourite form of the Devī frequently worshipped in Bengal in the later days.



## REFERENCES

1. Each sculpture described has been distinguished by a number which refers to that in K. N. Dikshit's Memoir on *Paharpur*.
2. *A.S.R.*, 1926-27, pp. 140, 145, pl. XXXII. c; *Paharpur*, p. 44.
3. Sukumar Sen, *History of Brajabuli literature*, p. 484.
4. *Teshām gopabadhuvilāsa-suhridām Rādhārahah sākshīnam |*  
*Kshemaṃ bhadra kalindaśaila-tanayā-tire latā-veshmanām | |*  
*Vichchhinne smaratalpa-kalpanamriduchchhedd = opayogo'dhunā |*  
*Te jāne jarathibhavati vigan-nīlatvishah pallavaḥ | |*  
*Dhvanyāloka* (Calcutta Sanskrit Series), II, p. 87.  
*Durarādhā Rādhā subhaga yad = anen = āpi mṛijata =*  
*stav = aīlat prāṇe sa-jaghana-vasanen = āśrupatitam |*  
*Kaṭhoram strichetas = stad = alam = upachārair = vīramahe*  
*Kriyāt kalyāṇam vo Harir-anunayeshi evam = uḍita | |*  
*Ibid.*, III, p. 282.
5. *Ekānaṃsā kāryā devī Baladeva-Kṛishṇayor = madhye |*  
*Kaṭi-saṃsthita-vāmakarā sarojam = itareṇa ch = odvahanti | |*  
*Bṛihat Saṃhitā*, chap. 57.  
*Ekānaṃs = āpi kartavyā devī padma-karā tathā |*  
*Kaṭisthā-vāmahastā sā madhyasthā Rāma-Kṛishṇayoḥ | |*  
*Viṣṇudharmottaram*, III, chap. 85.
6. *Kṛishṇas-chakradharaḥ kāryo nīlotpaladalach = chhaviḥ | |*  
*Indivarakarā kāryā tathā śyāmā cha Rukmiṇī |*  
*Tārksyasthā sā cha kartavyā Satyabhāmā surūpiṇī | |*  
*Ibid.*, III, chap. 85.
7. *A.S.R.*, 1924-25, pl. XXXII.
8. *Kūrmagā Yamunā kumbha-karā śyāmā cha pūjyate |*  
*Agni-purāṇa*, chap. 50.
9. *Vāme to Yamunā kāryā kūrma-samsthā sachāmarā |*  
*Nīlotpala-karā saumyā nilanīraja-samibhā | |*  
*Viṣṇudharmottaram*, III, chap. 52.
10. *A.S.R.*, 1924-25, pl. XXXII.
11. Patañjali, while commenting on Pāṇini's *sūtra* II. 2. 34, refers to the temples of Dhanapati, Rāma (Balarāma) and Keśava (Kṛishṇa). The Ghosundi inscription (*Ep. Ind.*, Vol. XXII, p. 204) refers to *pūjāśilā* of Saṅkarshaṇa and Vāsudeva. The Nānāghāt inscription of queen Nāganikā (*Select Inscriptions*, pp. 186 ff) begins with an invocation to Saṅkarshaṇa and Vāsudeva and to a few other divinities. The Morā well inscription (*Ep. Ind.*, Vol. XXIV, pp. 194 ff) records the installation of the radiant stone images of the five worshipful heroes of the Vṛishṇi clan, among whom Balarāma was one.
12. *Vaikhānasāgama*, quoted by T. A. Gopinath Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, Vol. I, pt. 2, App. p. 44.
13. *Balabhadro'nanta-mūrtiḥ . . . . |*  
*Agni-purāṇa*, chap. 15.



- In *Harivaṃśa*, chap. 64, v. 47 Kṛishṇa himself praises Balarāma as the ever-existent ancient Śeṣha.
14. *Gadā-lāṅgala-dhārī cha Rāmo vā'tha chatur-bhujah |*  
*Vām-ordhve lāṅgalaṃ dadyād=adhaḥ śaṅkhaṃ suśobhanam |*  
*Musalaṃ dakṣiṇ-ordhve tu chakraṇ=ch=ādhaḥ suśobhanam | |*  
*Agni-purāṇa*, chap. 49.
15. *Tṛitīyaṇ=cha tathā Rāmaṃ chatur-bāhuṃ śṛiṇushva me |*  
*Vām-ordhve lāṅgalaṃ dadyad-adhaḥ śaṅkhaṃ suśobhanam | |*  
*Musalaṃ dakṣiṇ-ordhve tu chakraṇ=ch=ādhaḥ suśobhanam |*  
*Gadāṃ kṛipāṇaṃ vā dadyat saṃsthāne śaṅkha-chakrayoḥ |*  
*Hayasirsha Pañcharātra* (Ms. S. K. Roy collection), *Ādi kāṇḍa*, chap. 23.  
*Baladevaś=chatur-bāhuḥ kuṇḍal=aika-vibhūṣitaḥ |*  
*Lāṅgalī musalī devo gadā-padma-dhara vibhūḥ | |*  
*Śaṅkha-chakra-gadā-pāṇiḥ kartavyo varado'thavā |*  
*Ibid.*, chap. 24.
16. Kālidāsa in his *Meghadūta* also refers to the blue garments of Balarāma (*Pūrva-megha*, verse 60).
17. *A.S.R.*, 1908-09, p. 113.
18. *J.I.S.O.A.*, Vol. II, pl. XXVIII. 1.
19. R. D. Banerji, *Eastern Indian School of Mediaeval Sculpture*, pl. I. b.
20. *Śambhoḥ śiras=indukalā vṛishadhvaḥ kṣi cha tṛitīyam=api cho'rdhvaṃ |*  
*Śūlaṃ dhanuḥ piṇākaṃ vāmo'rdhve cha Girisut=ārdham | |*  
*Bṛihat Saṃhitā*, chap. 57.
21. *Vishṇudharmottaram*, III, chap. 48, 1-19.
22. *Mahādeva-kare jñeyā tv=aksha-mālā kamaṇḍaluḥ | |*  
*Ibid.*, III. 48, 9.
23. *A.S.R.*, 1926-27, pl. XXXIII.
24. *Harivaṃśa*, chap. 59.
25. *Annual Bibliography of Indian Archaeology*, 1932, p. 29.
26. *A.S.R.*, 1926-27, p. 141. The same view is re-iterated in *Paharpur*.
27. *Mahābhārata* (Calcutta edition), *Ādi-parvan*, vv. 1153-ff.
28. *Matsya-purāṇa* (Vaṅgavāsī edition), chap. 250.
29. *Śiva-purāṇa* (Vaṅgavāsī edition), *Sanatkumāra Saṃhitā*, chap. 51.
30. *Ibid.*, chap. 28.



## CHAPTER SIX

### PĀHĀRPUR SCULPTURES : SECOND GROUP.

Among the sculptures of the second group at Pāhārpur there may be recognised several panels associated with Kṛishṇa's boyhood exploits. Of these may be mentioned the panels depicting Kṛishṇa uprooting the twin Arjuna trees (No. 3) and the wrestling contest of Kṛishṇa and Balarāma with Chānūra and Mushtika, the two wrestlers of Kāṃsa (No. 31). Another panel (No. 30), and this happens to be a fairly preserved one, has not, I am afraid, been properly interpreted by Dikshit, and we may be justified to begin the chapter with a discussion of it.<sup>1</sup> This particular sculpture, fixed to the basement wall on the south-east side, shows a male figure, standing to left in three-quarter profile, with his left foot over the head of a grotesque male, left elbow within the jaws of a demon, a horse or an ass, and right hand raised up to deal it a blow. On two sides are represented two trees; that to the proper left with its bare and shaft-like trunk topped by long rectangular leaves with pointed edges represents, most probably, a plantain tree, to be found also in several other sculptures at Pāhārpur. That to the right represents a tree with branches and heart-shaped foliage, but it is difficult to ascertain which tree it stands for. The figure is dressed in a lower garment, reaching down to the knees, fastened to the waist by a chain girdle, and a scarf is tied round the belly, the frill of which is schematically shown to the right. The harsh and crude lines of the eyes, with the disproportionate eyeballs protruding out, are in great contrast to the almost spiritual way in which the eyes are depicted in the figures of the first group. The ornaments on the person of the figure, especially the torque with medallions and tiger claws and the hair arranged in tufts (known as *kāka-paksha* in literature<sup>2</sup>), both peculiar to small boys, signify that the hero of the incident depicted is a boy. This peculiar arrangement of the hair, a distinctive speciality with young Kṛishṇa,<sup>3</sup> connects the incident with his early life, and it is not improbable that the

FIG. 17

FIG. 15

FIG. 16



panel illustrates one of the many exploits of Kṛishṇa and his elder brother Balarāma in their boyhood days.

According to Dikshit<sup>4</sup> the sculpture represents Balarāma attacking the donkey demon, Dhenuka, the guardian of the palm grove to the north of Govardhana. The story of *Dhenukāsura-vadha* has been given in the *Harivaṃśa* and almost all the other Purāṇas professing to describe the early life of Kṛishṇa. The story given in all these works is almost the same, with the only difference in the *Vishṇu-purāṇa* and the *Brahma-purāṇa* that there the exploit is attributed to Kṛishṇa, and not to Balarāma who, according to other authorities, is the main actor of this theme. The story runs as follows:

"On the banks of the Yamunā, to the north of Govardhana, there was a forest of *tāla* or palm trees. One day as Balarāma and Kṛishṇa were taking a stroll there in the company of the cowherd boys, they caught sight of the tempting clusters of *tāla* fruit, whose fragrance had permeated the whole sylvan atmosphere. They evinced a strong desire of tasting the ripe fruit, the smell of which was so sweet, and Balarāma commenced shaking down the fruits from the trees. The forest was jealously guarded by a demon, named Dhenuka, and his host, all of asinine form. As soon as the sound of falling fruits reached his ears he made for them, bit Balarāma and struck him with his rear legs. Balarāma forthwith seized him with those legs, flourished him in the air and hurled him against a palm tree with the result that the ass demon fell dead with his breast, waist and neck all shattered. After thus killing the demon he destroyed his host and opened out the whole forest to the cowherds."

We quote here the story, as given in the *Harivaṃśa* (chapter 69), in detail to show the wide divergence which the sculpture under notice presents to the story even in its material facts. The description of the sculpture and the story given, the points of divergences are apparent to every one. It appears that a possible likeness of the quadruped in the sculpture with an ass has led Dikshit to describe the sculpture as Balarāma fighting the ass demon Dhenuka. He has not given us the story, the main incident we should rather say, as to how the demon was fought and killed. Moreover, his attempt to describe the tree to the proper right as a palm, and his statement that it is "more successfully depicted



here than in other known examples of the scene" fail to be convincing. Dikshit has begun his description of the Kṛishṇa myth at Pāhārpur with a reference to similar representations of it at Mandor and Bādāmi. There is a representation of *Dhenukāsura-vadha* on a *torāṇa* pillar at Mandor<sup>5</sup> and another at least in a cave at Bādāmi.<sup>6</sup> In these sculptures, as narrated in the Purāṇas and the *Harivaṃśa*, we find Balarāma in the act of whirling the donkey demon in the air by the hind legs and hurling him against the palm tree, which, in each of the reliefs, is as much naturalistically depicted as is possible in stone within a space circumscribed. A tree with a plain cylindrical trunk, topped by clusters of fan-shaped leaves and bunches of round fruits,<sup>7</sup> as we find in each one of these reliefs, is certainly a more successful representation of the palm in comparison with a tree with long rectangular leaves, pointed at the edges, of the Pāhārpur sculpture.

The Pāhārpur sculpture thus cannot refer to the scene of *Dhenukāsura-vadha*, as it does not tally with the legend even in its principal theme. The only story to which the sculpture fully corresponds is that of *Keśi-nidhana* or the slaying of the demon Keśin by Kṛishṇa. The story, as told in the *Harivaṃśa* and the different Purāṇas, may be summarised below:

"When the attempts of Pūtānā, Dhenuka, Pralamba, Arishta, etc. to destroy Kṛishṇa failed Kāṃsa sent for Keśin, a demon of uncommon strength, and commissioned him to proceed immediately to Vṛindāvana to kill the nephew who was destined to put an end to him and his evil ways. Accordingly, Keśin appeared in Vṛindāvana in the shape of a powerful horse and set fear into the hearts of the people by his uncommon size, his thundering neighs and incessant striking of powerful hoofs. They took refuge with Kṛishṇa who came to the demon and challenged him. The demon ran towards Kṛishṇa with open jaws to devour him. The latter thrust his elbow into the jaws of the demon whose teeth were all uprooted in the attempt to tear away the arm of Kṛishṇa. Then, by his divine power, Kṛishṇa made his arm swell within the jaws of the demon who fell to the ground, vomiting blood and with his jaws torn asunder and blood-shot eyes coming out of the sockets. The inmates of Vṛindāvana, their fear dispelled, hailed Kṛishṇa with acclamations and the gods showered flowers on him from the heaven."<sup>8</sup>



The story told, even a casual observer may understand the sculpture which really represents Kṛishṇa fighting with Keśin, in the shape of a horse, and finally killing him. He has his left elbow thrust into the jaws of the demon, as described in the texts, and his right hand is engaged in dealing out blows. The figure under the foot of Kṛishṇa represents the final episode of the incident when the demon has fallen to the ground and has assumed his normal shape. He is in the throes of death struggle under the foot of Kṛishṇa who heavily tramples upon him to put an end to his fallen foe. The trees are most probably used as decorations, or may represent Vṛindāvana (the forest of Vṛindā), where the incident is said to have happened.

FIG. 15

Another panel (No. 31), next to the above in the south-eastern wall, exhibits two pairs of wrestling figures. One of the figures in each pair is distinguished by *kāka-paksha* hair and a torque with medallions and tiger claws, and in them we may recognise Kṛishṇa and Balarāma. The panel may thus represent the wrestling contest of Kṛishṇa and Balarāma with Kāṁsa's wrestlers, headed by Chānūra and Mushtika. The story, as given in the Purāṇas,<sup>9</sup> describes how Kāṁsa invited Kṛishṇa to Mathurā and tried to kill him, first with the help of the elephant, Kubalayāpīḍa, and subsequently through his famous wrestlers, Chānūra and Mushtika. Kṛishṇa and Balarāma passed triumphantly through these ordeals and finally killed Kāṁsa. Here, in the panel, we find one of the wrestlers almost overpowered by one of the brothers who, seizing him by one of the legs and shoulder, is on the point of hurling him, face downwards, to the ground. In case of the other pair the fight has just begun, each holding the other by the hands. The pedestal shows five low-carved lotus rosettes. All the figures are marked by vigour and energy and each one of them indicates a clear understanding of movement and action. We are tempted to identify the first pair as Kṛishṇa overpowering Chānūra from a description in the *Śrī-mahābhāgavata* which gives the main facts of the theme in brief.<sup>10</sup>

FIG. 17

A remarkable relief (No. 3) fixed to the basement on the north-eastern side exhibits a figure in dynamic movement, as is indicated by the powerful torso and the sweeping swing of the head to the right. The execution, however, is crude in a measure. The figure, distinguished by *kāka-paksha* hair and a collar of tiger claws,



appears to be no other than boy Kṛishṇa in one of his exploits. The flower bud worn in the left ear as a *kunḍala* is interesting. Kṛishṇa stands with bent knees with his feet firmly planted on the heads of two grotesque figures, shown in great fright and agony, and by his two hands he breaks down two trees on his two sides. The highly strung eyebrows and the sensitive line of every feature of the face, as well as the dynamic attitude bespeak great energy and movement. On one side is fixed a broken pillar which shows indifferent copies of Gupta motifs, such as pot and foliage at the bottom and *kīrtimukha* in the middle. The top of the pillar is damaged. The relief depicting Kṛishṇa breaking two trees at once reminds us of Kṛishṇa's feat in uprooting two Arjuna trees (*yamalārjuna*) when he was almost a baby. But the scene, as depicted here, is slightly different from the description of the theme in literature. The story<sup>11</sup> should best be given in brief for comparison. "Unable to check the pranks of the boy Kṛishṇa, Yaśodā, his adopted mother, once bound him to a heavy mortar with a string (*dāma*) and became engaged in her household works. The child, however, continued to ramble about dragging the mortar behind him and when he was passing through two Arjuna trees the mortar got stuck between them. The boy continued pulling it and as a result of the pull the two trees were uprooted and their trunks and branches broken. The inhabitants of Vraja, on the sound of the crash, hastened to the spot and found the smiling boy standing between two uprooted trees. The two trees were in reality two Gandharva princes, transformed by a curse of Nārada for their improper conduct in the past, and Kṛishṇa, through this feat, liberated them from the curse."

But by far the majority of sculptures of the second group are independent images, stiff and conventional, from which, as we have already observed, the images of the Pāla school appear to have their origin. Mention should first be made of a remarkable sculpture (No. 29) on the basement of the south-eastern side. It shows the god Indra, the guardian (*dikpāla*) of the eastern quarter and lord of the heaven. The deity has two arms and a halo behind his head; his hair falls in curls on his shoulders. A beaded collar, a pair each of *kunḍalas*, armlets and bracelets, a stringed girdle with a clasp and tassels in front and a jewelled diadem are the ornaments that bedeck his person. The fringe

FIG. 22



of hair edging the diadem in front is worth noticing. He has also a belly-band (*udara-bandha*). The *dhoti* with fine folds reaches just a little below the knees. The modelling and execution are superb. A fold just below the chest, another fold below the navel, the slight protuberance of the knees shown beneath the *dhoti*, have been finely delineated. But the almost rectangular face with a fully crescent-shaped mouth and the highly curved and strung eyebrows add a rather comic effect. Again, in respect of proportion the figure appears to be rather tall. Behind the god may be seen his mount Airāvata in a rather animated attitude. The vertical creeper scrolls on the two upright jambs on the two sides are also remarkable for their fine and elegant execution.

The objects in his hands cannot be identified. The only cognisances that lead to the identification of the figure as that of Indra are his mount Airāvata and the third eye, horizontally shown on his forehead. Dikshit<sup>12</sup> is at a loss to understand the significance of this third eye, "which is generally associated with Śiva", in the case of Indra. A verse in the *Bṛihat Saṃhitā*<sup>13</sup> may, however, be cited to explain this peculiar feature. It lays down that one of the cognisances of Indra should be his third eye, 'placed horizontally on the forehead'. The *Vishṇudharmottaram*<sup>14</sup> also prescribes this feature as one of the distinctive cognisances of Indra. It may be pointed in this connection that this distinctive feature, though not mentioned in the texts of later ages as one of the cognisances of Indra, continued to be shown in the representations of Indra, plastic as well as pictorial, found in Nepal. Two examples may be cited in this context. One is a seated bronze image of Indra of about the tenth century A.D., now in a private collection in America.<sup>15</sup> The second is a painted representation of Indra on the wooden cover of a palm leaf manuscript of *Aṣṭa-sāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, copied in A.D. 1028, now in the collection of the author.<sup>16</sup> It is also of interest to find that the Nepalese artists still manufacture images of Indra with the horizontal third eye, and one such image is now in the author's possession. To turn again to the Pāhārpur sculpture. We have already observed that the attributes held by Indra in his hands cannot be recognised. But whatever they may be, they do neither tally with those prescribed by the *Bṛihat Saṃhitā* and the *Vishṇudharmottaram*, nor with those of the known Purāṇic texts, and



*Vajra* (thunderbolt), the most distinctive emblem of the god according to the majority of the texts and present in all later images, is found to be absent in the Pāhārpur sculpture.

Of the other *dikpālas* or guardians of the quarters of the Hindu pantheon, we have Agni, the god of fire and lord of the south-eastern quarter, Yama (?), the god of death and lord of the southern quarter, and Kubera, the god of wealth and lord of the northern quarter, represented at Pāhārpur. Agni was an important divinity in the Vedic pantheon, but his importance appears to have dwindled in the later times. In the developed Hindu pantheon his place is primarily as one of the *dikpālas*. Images of Agni, except as one of the *dikpālas*, are also very rare. The great diversity in the iconographical descriptions of Agni in the different texts<sup>17</sup> indicates, however, that the worship of the god has been fairly popular. As guardian of the south-eastern quarter, Agni appears in human form the iconographical details of which are conflicting and, not unoften, unusual, such as two or three faces, three legs, seven arms, etc. Even in the case of a simple form the texts are not always unanimous. The image of Agni (No. 34) at Pāhārpur appears on the south-eastern wall, the appropriate canonical position, so to say. It shows a rather flabby person, standing erect, with two hands, the left bearing a water pot (*kamaṇḍalu*, *kuṇḍikā*) and the right a rosary (*akṣha-sūtra*). Flames of fire are exhibited in the background, and to his right appears a mutilated figure, perhaps his wife Svāhā-devī. Artistically, the figure is not of much quality, but the fine arrangement of the hair is worthy of praise. So far as the attributes and general disposition of the image are concerned, it resembles two descriptions of the god, one in the *Matsya-purāṇa*,<sup>18</sup> and the other in the *Hayasīrsha Pañcharātra*.<sup>19</sup> Beard, an almost invariable association of Agni in many of the texts and also in later images, and the third eye, which is especially prescribed for the god in the *Vishṇudharmottaram*,<sup>20</sup> are absent.

Yama was also an important divinity in the Vedic pantheon, but was later on relegated to an inferior position as the god of death and Lord of the southern quarter. The most distinctive of his cognisances, in respect of which the texts are mostly unanimous, are the buffalo mount and *daṇḍa* (club) as an attribute in one of the hands. *Pāśa* (noose) also appears in the company

FIG. 18

FIG. 19

FIG. 20

FIG. 18



FIG. 19

of *daṇḍa* as an attribute of Yama in some of the texts. The Yama figure at Pāhārpur (No. 39) is to be recognised by its position in the main southern wall. The god stands upright between two attendants, one male to his left and the other female, with the head missing, to his right. Perhaps they represent Chitrāgupta and Dhūmorṇā, Yama's wife, who according to the *Vishṇu-dharmottaram*,<sup>21</sup> are to be sculptured along with him; but the other details in that text regarding these attendant figures do not tally. By his two hands, raised as high as the shoulders, the god holds a noose, spread over his head with the ends hanging downwards. A precise and definitive modelling characterises the physical form, to which the harsh lines of the face seem to be rather jarring. The hair is tied with the upper tuft disposed almost in the manner of the conventional curls of the Buddha. The ornaments and the drapery are rather pleasingly executed.

It should be noted, however, that our identification of the present image as that of Yama rests on its position in the main southern wall. *Pāśa* or noose, though one of his attributes in some texts, cannot be regarded as the most distinctive cognisance of Yama. Wherever it is referred to, it has been mentioned along with the club, but never alone. His most decisive cognisances, the buffalo mount and the club in one of the hands, are wanting in this sculpture. *Pāśa* (noose) is particularly the emblem of Varuṇa, the lord of the ocean and the guardian of the western region. All the available texts are unanimous in mentioning *pāśa* as the distinctive attribute of Varuṇa, while the majority mention it as the only one attribute. For this he has the epithet *Pāśa-bhṛit* or *Pāśin* (one who bears *pāśa* or noose). Had it not been for its position, the present sculpture might have been more conclusively identified as that of Varuṇa. At present we are not in a position to say whether the image, as it now is, occupies its original niche. But in view of the evidences of subsequent tamperings in many instances, the idea is not improbable that the image is really that of Varuṇa and was meant for the western wall, but was later on put in its present position, either through mistake or through an ignorance of its correct interpretation.

FIG. 20

A detached image at Pāhārpur, stylistically belonging to this group, shows a pot-bellied male figure seated on a four-legged stool, below which appear a *śaṅkha* (conchshell) on a tripod



and a *padma*, the latter supporting the right leg, now damaged, of the figure. On either side stands a female attendant, that to his left holding a flywhisk (*chāmara*). In the upper section of the stela may be seen two garland-bearing flying figures, one on each side of the head. The main figure is two-handed, the left bearing a receptacle in form of a bag or purse; the right is damaged. The pot-bellied figure with a receptacle in hand indicates that Kubera, the god of wealth and guardian of the northern quarter, is intended to be represented in this image. The texts are not unanimous regarding the attributes of the god, but pot-belly (*lambodara*, *mahodara*), a man as his mount and a receptacle of wealth in one of the hands are described to be his principal cognisances. The manly mount is, however, absent in the present sculpture which has, again, a special interest in the fact that two fangs are shown on both sides of the mouth, a feature that is not to be found in any other known image of the god. This peculiar feature may be explained with reference to the *Vishṇudharmottaram*<sup>22</sup> which, among other details, lacking in the present sculpture, prescribes that Kubera should be shown with two fangs in the mouth. *Śaṅkha* and *padma*, below the stool, represent two of the eight *nidhis* (treasures), which are to have their own forms, as described in the above text.<sup>23</sup>

A panel (No. 61) on the western wall shows in high relief a fat male figure standing erect on a plain *tri-ratha* pedestal with a kneeling devotee, with folded hands, to his right. He has two hands; in the left, raised to shoulders, he bears a manuscript (*pustaka*), and the right, disposed in *varada*, exhibits a rosary (*aksha-mālā*). He wears a short *dhoti* or a skin tied to the waist by a string girdle, while an *uttariya* is seen covering the upper part of the body. No ornaments bedeck his person and the hair is carefully arranged upward with a knot in the middle. Two trees, perhaps plantain trees, appear on two sides in the background, while an arch with the facade decorated with lotus rosettes is seen above his head. In spite of the heavy features, a dreamy appearance of the eyes, a smiling beatitude of the whole face and the elegant pose of the kneeling devotee are worth noticing. R. D. Banerji<sup>24</sup> would think the image to be a representation of the God Brahmā. Dikshit, too, describes the image as that of Brahmā in his *Memoir on Pāhārpur*.<sup>25</sup> It seems

FIG. 23



that the manuscript and the rosary as attributes were responsible for such a description. Nevertheless, the absence of additional faces and hands of Brahmā prevents us from accepting this identification. The *viṣṇudharmottaram* gives us prescriptions for the making of *grahas* (planets) and one such prescription lays down that Bṛihaspati, the preceptor of the gods, is to have two hands, holding a manuscript and a rosary, and a complexion like that of molten gold.<sup>26</sup> The image under notice exactly corresponds to the above description, and so far as we are aware, this is perhaps the earliest representation of Bṛihaspati in art.

FIG. 24

Next to this sculpture, and forming a corner with it, there appears another (No. 60), which shows a male figure, standing quite erect between two plantain trees and bearing a water pot in the left hand, which hangs down, and a rosary in the right, which is raised up. Over the head the hair is artistically arranged in a *jaṭā-mukūṭa* (matted tiara). Otherwise, the entire person is devoid of any ornament. What is specially interesting, again, is that a prominent crescent-mark appears over the matted tiara. It is a rather fine sculpture, and though the face is slightly abraided it has a beautiful smile. A soft and sensitive modelling and a certain amount of linearism characterise the figure. The only god that we know of as wearing a crescent-moon (*ardha-chandra*, *indukalā*) on the head is the god Śiva, and on this datum only R. D. Banerji<sup>27</sup> described the image as that of 'Śiva conceived as Somanātha, the lord of the moon'. Dikshit,<sup>28</sup> too, reiterates the same view when he describes the god in the image as Śiva Chandra-śekhara. But any association of the present image with Śiva appears to be improbable on account of the absence of his other invariable cognisances, such as the *ūrdhva-līṅga*, the vertical third eye, etc. There are several images of Śiva at Pāhārpur and the artists seem to have been fairly conversant with the distinctive iconography of the god. The crescent-mark is an important feature, no doubt, and cannot be ignored. But the absence of the other distinctive cognisances is difficult to explain, in case the image was conceived as that of Śiva. The only other alternative is to identify the image either as that of Chandra (the Moon god and second in the list of the nine planets), or as Soma, the third of the eight Vasus. The Moon god Chandra has a fair number of *dhyānas*, but his image is but rarely met with.



A simple description of the Moon god appears in the *Agni-purāṇa*<sup>29</sup> where it is said that Chandra should have a water pot and a rosary as his attributes. The present image bears exactly these attributes which, combined with the crescent-mark over the head, make the identification of the image as that of Chandra quite certain.

In this group of sculptures at Pāhārpur two images of Śiva appear. Of these one (No. 40) appears on the southern wall and represents a rather slender type. The god stands with a slight flexion and has two hands, the left with a long trident (*triśūla*) and the right in *varada*. A snake appears over his right shoulder; a prominent *ūrdhva-līṅga* is shown and the third eye on the forehead is just like an oval patch. The *jaṭā-mukūṭa* is peculiar in having the upper tuft gathered horizontally, a feature common at Pāhārpur, which has a parallel in the panel depicting the visit of Rāma and Lakṣhaṇa to the hermitage of Śavari, found during the excavations on the site of the Daśāvatāra temple at Deogarh (Jhānsī district).<sup>30</sup> But for the long sacred thread of two courses of beads, a chain girdle, a pair each of bracelets and armlets and a broad collar, the whole body appears to be bare. The execution and modelling are deteriorated to a certain extent. Eyes and mouth are distorted. When the present image is compared with the other Śiva figure (No. 37) at Pāhārpur, already described, the exhaustion of the Gupta classical trend in the second group of Pāhārpur sculptures will be apparent to everyone. In spite of the slight flexion, it is evident that life has departed from this characteristic pose of the early Gupta sculptures. A verse in the *Hayaśirsha Pañcharātra*<sup>31</sup> describes Hara with two hands, the left holding trident and the right disposed in *varada*, and the image under notice, exactly corresponding to this description, appears to represent the 'Hara' aspect of Śiva. The other image of Śiva (No. 4) in this group represents the god standing on a plain pedestal with a slight bend. Of the two hands, the left, now broken, holds a trident (?) with its upper end missing, and the right, stretched in *varada*, bears a rosary. The god wears a sacred thread, a plain girdle fastening the tiger skin to the waist, a pair each of armlets, bracelets and ear-tops, and a necklace. The *jaṭā* is tied upward in a knot, and the figure exhibits *ūrdhva-līṅga*, a snake over the right shoulder and the ver-

FIG. 25

FIG. 12



tical third eye on the forehead. The *vāhana*, the bull, is shown to proper left, but in a wrong perspective, with the front legs and head upward. In spite of this ludicrous blunder, it supplies us with an additional, but one of the most important, point in the iconography of Śiva.

FIG. 26

Mention should next be made of a sculpture (No. 62) on the north-western wall, showing a fat and pot-bellied figure standing with a slight *bhaṅga* (bend) between two plantain shoots on the two sides. He has two hands; in the left, hanging downwards, he holds a water pot and in the right, raised to shoulder, a rosary. He wears a *dhoti* hanging down to the ankles and fastened to the waist by a strap. This *dhoti* is diaphanously treated. He wears, besides, a long sacred thread. No ornaments bedeck his person. The head is crowned by *jaṭā*, tied upward and with heavy curls falling at the back. The face, though mutilated, wears a calm and serene expression. To proper left is shown a dwarfish figure seated with folded hands. Another figure (No. 2) in the same wall, but of coarser workmanship and apparently belonging to the third group of sculptures, also exhibits similar cognisances, namely, water pot and rosary in the two hands, and *jaṭāmukuta* on the head, and is likewise distinguished by lack of ornaments. R. D. Banerji<sup>32</sup> describes the former as a "corpulent ascetic" but does not discuss the real identity of the figure. In his *Memoir* on Pāhārpur Dikshit<sup>33</sup> describes the former as Śiva and the latter as Brahmā, which are, no doubt, suggestions, made tentatively. The iconographic identity of these sculptures is rather difficult to ascertain. Water pot and rosary are common with so many divinities. On the basis of these attributes and matted hair one may be tempted to identify these figures as representing the Mahādeva aspect of Śiva-Mahādeva in his all-pervading form (cf. No. 37). But the absence of the *ūrdhva-liṅga* and the vertical *trinetra*, which we invariably notice in every other Śiva figure at Pāhārpur, would preclude such an identification. Dikshit's identification of the second sculpture as Brahmā does not also seem to be convincing on account of the absence of the additional heads and hands. To explain the form presented by the two images we have again to turn to the *Vishṇudharmottaram*, our invaluable guide in the study of the iconography of the Pāhārpur sculptures, where we find a



description of the Manus, both present and future. The images under review closely conform to the description of future Manu who is enjoined to be represented as being divested of all ornaments and bearing a rosary and water pot in the two hands.<sup>34</sup> From this description there can be no doubt that the above two images represent the future Manu of the *Vishṇudharmottaram* text.

Next we come to another sculpture (No. 53) just by the side of the image of Manu and forming a corner with it. It shows a male figure, standing on a plain pedestal with a slight bend to right. Of the two hands, the left rests on the hip, while the right holds a flower blossom (*utpala*?). The *dhōti* reaches just above the knees and a scarf passes diagonally across the hips and is knotted to his left. A belly-band may also be seen clasped in front. The latter two features appear to be reminiscent of the first group of sculptures at Pāhārpur. The hair, tied up, is beautifully shown and a circular *tilaka* mark is seen in the centre of the forehead. The figure shows *ūrdhva-liṅga*<sup>35</sup> and on this basis R. D. Banerji<sup>36</sup> and Dikshit<sup>37</sup> describe it as Śiva. The description appears to be correct, though the other cognisance, the third eye, unless it is indicated by the circular *tilaka* mark on forehead, is absent. The presence of snake armlet (*sarpāṅgada*), which we find in other sculptures of Śiva,<sup>38</sup> in the sculpture under notice and the neatly tied *jaṭā* on the head may be cited as additional corroborative evidences. The lily blossom (*utpala*) in the right hand also does not militate against this identification as, according to a few of the *dhyānas*, the god Śiva may have an *utpala* in one or other of his many forms. The figure is bedecked with a necklace and a pair each of armlets, bracelets and ear-tops. The elegant attitude and a rather smooth and well-defined modelling mark it as a closer approach to the first group than to the second. The edges of the back slab have been so carved as to form a rectangle up to the shoulders of the figure and a circular halo around the head.

FIG. 27

There are two images of Gaṇeśa at Pāhārpur, of which one belongs definitely to the third group. Gaṇeśa or Gaṇapati, the elephant-headed deity, is the god of luck, the giver of success, the remover of obstacles and the patron of merchants, of writers (for he is the scribe of the gods) and, in fact, of everyone who should invoke him before any enterprise or before appealing to



any other god. In usually accepted mythology he is the eldest son of Śiva and legends about the loss of his human head and its substitution by one of elephant are narrated in the Purāṇas. He is a fairly popular divinity in Indian religion and art and there are texts in abundance describing his images. All of them are agreed in giving him an elephant-head, a dwarfish form, a pot-belly and a rat as his mount. All these constitute his most distinctive cognisances. But they are rarely unanimous in respect of his attributes, among which the most common are trident, rosary, pot full of sweetmeats, tusk, radish, lotus flower, axe, etc. The four-handed form of Gaṇeśa is usually termed as Vināyaka, as we may know from such texts as the *Vishṇudharmottaram*, the *Matsya-purāṇa* and the *Agni purāṇa*. The image belonging to the second group at Pāhārpur (No. 17) appears on the south-eastern wall and shows the pot-bellied god seated on the pedestal with the left knee raised up. He has four hands, upper right bearing a radish (*mūlaka-kanda*) lower right a rosary (*aksha-mālā*), upper left a trident (*śūlaka*) and the lower left, very probably, a snake. A rat is incised on the pedestal in rather shallow lines. Among the usual ornaments worn by the god may be mentioned a diadem round the temple. The other specimen (No. 5) appears in the north-eastern wall. The god is shown seated on a pedestal with the left leg lying flat on it and the right tucked up and kept in position by a strap passing round the body and the leg. A rat is shown on the pedestal. Of the four hands, the lower left rests on the knee, the upper left bears a radish, the upper right, perhaps, a lotus (*utpala*) and the lower right a pot of sweetmeats which the god is seen to be relishing with the help of his proboscis. The matted hair, shown on the elephant-head, supply a distinctive feature which cannot be missed, and its upper tuft is disposed horizontally. It should be noted that in all the known images of Gaṇeśa of the later ages the *jaṭā-mukuṭa* is the only coiffure that god bears.

#### REFERENCES

1. The author's article on this sculpture was first published in the *Indian Culture*, Vol. III, 1936, pp. 195-98.
2. *Vālānām tu śikhā proktā kāka-pakṣaḥ śikhaṇḍikā* |  
Halāyudha, *Abhidhāna Ratnamālā*.



Also *Sā vālānām kāka-pakshaḥ śikhaṇḍaka-śikhaṇḍakau* /  
Hemachandra, *Abhidhāna Chintāmaṇi*.

3. *Harivaṃśa*, chap. 67.
4. *A.S.R.*, 1926-27, p. 144, pl. XXXII. a; *Paharpur*, p. 40.
5. *A.S.R.*, 1905-06, p. 138, fig. 2.
6. *Mem. A.S.I.*, No. 25, p. 51, pl. XXIV. b.
7. *A.S.R.*, 1905-06, p. 138, fig. 2.
8. *Harivaṃśa*, chap. 80; *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, X, chap. 37; *Vishṇu-purāṇa*, V, chap. 16; *Brahmaivaivarta-purāṇa*, chap. 190.
9. *Vishṇu-purāṇa*, V, chap. 20; *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, X, chaps. 43 and 44.
10. *Mallakshetre sthitau Rāma-Kṛishṇau bhīma-parākramau* /  
*Mallāḥ sambodhyāmāsur = Mushṭikādyā mahābalāḥ* / /  
*Tatra sampātayāmāsa mushṭi-ghātena Mushṭikam* /  
*Rohiṇi-tanayo Rāmo mahābala-parākramaḥ* / /  
*Kṛishṇo'ny = apātayad = vīraṃ Chānūraṃ prithivī-tale* /  
*Utthāya gaganam bhūyo nīpātya muni-sattama* / /  
*Anyāś = cha śataś mallān Rāma-Kṛishṇau kshaṇārdhataḥ* /  
*Pātayāmāsatuh saṃkhye darśayantau parākramam* / /  
*Śrī-Mahābhāgavata* (Ms. Collection S. K. Ray), chap. 52.
11. *Vishṇu-purāṇa*, V, chap. 6; *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, X, chap. 9; *Harivaṃśa*, chap. 63.
12. *A.S.R.*, 1926-27, p. 145. In *Paharpur*, p. 46, he describes this as a "peculiar feature" of this figure.
13. *Śuklaś = chatur = vishāṇaḥ dvīpo Mahendrasya vājra-pāṇitam* /  
*Tiryyak = lalāṭa-saṃsthaṃ tṛitīyaṃ lochanam chihṇam* / /  
*Bṛihat Saṃhitā*, chap. 57, 42.  
Utpala comments on the passage *tiryyak-lalāṭa-saṃsthaṃ* of the text:  
*tiryyak kṛitvā lalāṭe sthitam*. He also quotes the following extract from *kāśyapa*:  
*Airāvataś = chatur = ddantaḥ śveta-gātro mahābhujah* /  
*Tad = āruḍho Mahendras = tu vajrahasto mahābalaḥ* / /  
*Tiryyag = lalāṭagaṃ netraṃ tṛitīyaṃ tasya kārayet* /
14. *Tiryyag = lalāṭagen = akshṇā kartavyaś = cha vibhūṣitaḥ* /  
*Trinetratā cha tasy = oktā devadevena Śambhunā* / /  
*Vishṇudharmottaram*, III, chap. 50, 3-7.
15. Heinrich Zimmer, *Art of Indian Asia*, Vol. II, fig. 599.
16. *Lalita Kalā*, No. 6, p. 54, pl. E.
17. *Matsya-purāṇa*; *Agni-purāṇa*; *Vishṇudharmottaram*; *Hayaśirsha Pañcharātra*; *Prapañchasāra-tantra*; *Sūprabhedāgama*; *Pūrva-kāraṇāgama*; *Śilparatna*; *Rūpamaṇḍana*; *Vratakhaṇḍa*; etc.
18. *Vahṇes = tu lakṣaṇam vakshye sarva-kāma-phala-pradam* /  
*Dīptam suvarṇa-vapusham = ardhachandrāsane sthitam* / /  
*Vālārka-sadṛīṣaṃ tasya vadanam tasya kārayet* /  
*Yajñopavitinaṃ devaṃ lambakūrchcha-dharaṃ tathā* / /  
*Kamaṇḍaluṃ vāmakare dakṣiṇe tu = aksha-sūtrakam* /  
*Jvālāvitāna-samyuktam = aja-vāhanam = ujjavalam* / /



- Kuṇḍastham vā'pi kurvīta mūrdhṇi sapta-sikh = ānvitam |*  
*Matsya-purāṇa*, chap. 261, 9-12.
19. *Jvālā-maṇḍala-madhyasthaḥ kūrchchālāḥ śmaśrulas = tathā |*  
*Yogaṇḍaḥ = āsan = opeto brahma-sūtra-vibhūṣitaḥ | |*  
*... .. divāhur = vai kāryo vahur = vilohitaḥ |*  
*Dakṣiṇe ch = āksha-sūtraṇ = tu kuṇḍikāṃ vāmato nyaset | |*  
*Hayasirsha Pañcharātra*, I, chap. 28.
20. cf. *Jvālā-māl = ākulaṃ saumyaṃ trinetraṃ śmaśru-dhāriṇam |*  
*Vishṇudharmottaram*, III, chap. 56.
21. *Vishṇudharmottaram*, III, chap. 51.
22. *Dve cha dmasṭre mukhe tasya . . . | Vishṇudharmottaram*, III, chap. 53.
23. *Śaikhā-padma-nidhī kāryau svarūpa-nidhī saṃsthitau | Ibid.*
24. *A.S.R.*, 1925-26, pp. 69, 111.
25. *Paharpur*, p. 54.
26. *Tapta-jāmbunadaḥ kāryo dvibhujaś = cha Bṛihaspatiḥ |*  
*Pustakaṃ ch = āksha-mālāṇ = cha karayos = tasya karayet | |*  
*Vishṇudharmottaram*, III, chap. 69.
27. *A.S.R.*, 1925-26, p. 111.
28. *Paharpur*, p. 53.
29. *Agni-purāṇa*, chap. 51 : *Kuṇḍikā-jāpyamāl = Indu . . . |*
30. *A.S.R.*, 1917-18, p. 6, pl. I. a.
31. *Trisūla-dhṛik tathā vāme varado dakṣiṇena tu |*  
*Dvibhujo'yam Haraḥ sākshāt sarva-kāma-phala-pradaḥ | |*  
*Hayasirsha Pañcharātra*, I, chap. 29.  
 cf. also bronze image of Śiva from Manirtaṭ (*ante*, p. 32-33).
32. *A.S.R.*, 1925-26, p. 111.
33. *Paharpur*, pp. 54, 38.
34. *Vartamāno Manuḥ kāryo rāja-lakṣaṇa-saṃyutaḥ |*  
*Bhaviṣyas = tu tathā kāryaḥ sarv = ābharaṇa-varijitaḥ |*  
*Jaṭā-dharo'ksha-mālī cha kamaṇḍalu-dharas = tathā | |*  
*Vishṇudharmottaram*, III, chap. 70.
35. The *ūrdhva-līṅga*, as seen in the photograph, may appear to be nothing but a simulation, a strange combination of the vertical lines of the belly-band and horizontal waist-line being responsible for such an appearance. A comparison with the original is necessary to clear up the point.
36. *A.S.R.*, 1925-26, p. 111.
37. *Paharpur*, p. 54.
38. In literature, too, Śiva is enjoined to have snake ornaments cf. *Matsya-purāṇa*: *bhujaṅg = ābharaṇas-tathā; bhujaṅga-hāra-valayaṃ; etc.* Hemādri, *Vratakhanda*: *Kapāla-mālīnaṃ raudraṃ sarvalaḥ sarpa-bhūṣaṇam. Meghadūta*, *Pūrva-megha*, verse 61, also describes Śiva with *bhujaṅga-valayā*.
39. *Vishṇudharmottaram*, III, chap. 71; *Bṛihat Saṃhitā*, chap. 57; *Matsya-purāṇa*, chap. 260; *Agni-purāṇa*, chap. 50; etc.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### PĀHĀRPUR SCULPTURES : THIRD GROUP

In the third group of sculptures the narrative reliefs are found to predominate over the independent images which constitute the majority in the second group. It has already been observed that the third group of Pāhārpur sculptures represents not a refined and finished tradition, but an indigenous trend constituting an art of the people, naive and crude, yet sincere and vigorous. It is regrettable that sculptures of this group, perhaps because of the coarse material used, are not so well preserved as those of the other two, and many of them are difficult of interpretation on account of the absence of details which are worn away.

On the south-eastern wall there appears a relief (No. 45) in which a man is seen carrying an infant in his arms. The figures are extremely abraded, and though other details are lacking it appears that we have here the representation of Vasudeva carrying Kṛishṇa, just after his birth in the prison of Kāṃsa, to Gokula in order to save the new-born child from the clutches of his tyrant uncle.<sup>1</sup> Another detached sculpture, belonging to this group, shows a male and a female figure, the female handing over a baby to the male. Perhaps we have here a representation of Devakī making over new-born Kṛishṇa to Vasudeva for transfer to Gokula.<sup>2</sup>

FIG. 29

A better preserved sculpture (No. 46) shows us a plump boy in three-quarter profile, with his left hand on the waist and the right holding something on which he seems to bestow an enraptured look. He wears a pair of shorts and among the ornaments, particularly juvenile, may be mentioned a pair of circular rings at the ankles, a pair of bangles, a waist-band of rectangular medallions and a necklace of tiger claws. The hair is arranged in heavy curls. We think we have here a representation of the boy Kṛishṇa heartily enjoying, alone and away from the sight of others, a lump of butter, the spoil of an adventurous theft (cf. his epithet of butter-thief so popularly current in Bengal).

FIG. 28



An extremely weathered panel (No. 48) in the south-eastern wall exhibits three boys, each with a curly hair and shorts, two on two sides and the third in the centre. The third boy appears to be enjoying a swing supported by his two companions.<sup>3</sup> Though the faces are almost all worn out, the lively enjoyment and fun are stamped in every one of them. Perhaps we have here a representation of one of the various sports of Kṛishṇa and Balarāma with the cowherd boys of their train.<sup>4</sup> It is likely, again, that the relief (No. 44) showing two figures—one boyish and the other female, the female with a pot in the right hand and a pile of vessels on the head—may represent Kṛishṇa's dalliance with the *gopīs* or cowherd girls of Gokula.

But if the association of Kṛishṇa with the above panels is more or less problematic, we stand on surer ground when we come to another (No. 19) in the south-eastern wall. Though other details are lacking, we have here an unmistakable representation of Kṛishṇa holding up mountain Govardhana in order to shelter the people of Gokula from the torrential rains sent down by Indra. The story goes that once on the advice of Kṛishṇa the cowherds of Gokula gave up their annual feast and worship to Indra. Indra flew into a rage and sent down torrential rains, but Kṛishṇa, who was too original for Indra, pulled up mount Govardhana with utmost ease (*līlayā*) and held it aloft like an umbrella. Being assured of its safety the cowherds, with all their belongings, took shelter under it, and the heavy downpour, which continued for seven days, failed to create the desired effect. Baffled in his purpose, Indra stopped the rains and worshipped Kṛishṇa who, in his turn, was pleased and performed the Indra festival.<sup>5</sup> In this sculpture we find Kṛishṇa with four hands, holding up the mountain with the upper two. Of the other two, one passes round the body of a female figure and the remaining hand tries to push away, perhaps in fun, a male figure with a staff who, too, appears to be greatly enjoying this frolic. The front of the mountain is artistically carved in the shape of the open upper jaw of a *makara*. In spite of the crudeness of execution, the figures show lively movement and expression. It should be noted further that the panel is much smaller than the niche in which it is now fixed.

A panel (No. 1) in the north-eastern wall appears also to have some association with an exploit of the early life of Kṛishṇa.



It probably represents the incident of *Pralamba-vadha* or the killing of the demon Pralamba by Balarāma. A detailed description of the theme may be found in the *Harivaṃśa*,<sup>6</sup> the *Vishṇu-purāṇa*<sup>7</sup> and the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*.<sup>8</sup> The story, as given in these texts, may briefly be summarised here.

FIG. 30

“After the killing of Dhenuka by Balarāma the two brothers repaired to Bhaṇḍira-vana and there they began regaling themselves, in the company of other cowherd boys, with sports, songs, wrestling contexts, gymnastic exercises, etc. While they were thus engaged there came Pralamba, the foremost of the *asuras*, with a view to kill them. Assuming the form of a cowherd boy Pralamba joined the party in sports. Meanwhile, Kṛishṇa started a new pastime of leaping in pairs and every one engaged in it. It was also agreed that the vanquished one should carry the winner on his shoulders. And, thus the defeated Kṛishṇa carried Śrīdāma, Bhadrasena Vṛishabha, Pralamba Balarāma, and so on. Every pair returned to the Bhaṇḍiraka tree, but Pralamba, carrying Balarāma, proceeded quickly to the opposite direction like a cloud with the moon. Unable to carry the weight of Balarāma, the demon began to increase his size and ultimately assumed his own huge body, effulgent like a mountain of burnt collyrium, and resembling Death, with eyes like the wheels of a car and head adorned with a sun-like coronet. Balarāma was a little frightened and asked Kṛishṇa as to what should be done. Kṛishṇa asked him to remember his own divine aspect and strength and his divine attributes and advised him to strike forcibly with the fist, as firm as thunderbolt, the head of the *dānava*. Thus inspired, Balarāma with his well-formed fist, resembling a thunderbolt, struck the wicked Pralamba on the head. The demon, killed outright, touched the ground and lay like a mass of cloud scattered in the sky.” In the panel at Pāhārpur we find three figures, of which the big one in the centre carries a plump dwarf figure on his shoulders. This pair, in all probability, represent Pralamba carrying away Balarāma,<sup>9</sup> and the boyish figure on one side with a flute, perhaps, Kṛishṇa. The face of Pralamba exhibits an appearance of immense satisfaction, as he thinks himself on the point of attaining his object. Balarāma too, as yet unaware of the wicked designs of the *asura*, appears to be enjoying the fun of being carried over.



There are some other panels, again, which may be recognised to have some association with several themes of the Hindu epics, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Mention should first be made of a panel (No. 54) in the western wall showing two archers, one on the shoulders of a human figure to proper right and the second on a chariot to proper left, fighting with each other. Both the figures are distinguished by halos behind their heads. It appears probable that the person on the shoulders of another figure may represent Kṛishṇa on Garuḍa and that on the chariot, Arjuna, and this context at once reminds us of the theme of *Subhadrā-haraṇa* (abduction of Subhadrā, sister of Kṛishṇa, by Arjuna) described in the *Vanaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*. The figures are badly weathered, but from whatever is preserved it appears that the fighters are not at all in belligerent mood, but seem to be engaged in a mock or friendly fight. This is not at all surprising, as in the story we find Kṛishṇa to be a conniving party to the intrigue of the abduction of his sister and is stated to have put up a show of fight for his prestige, as well as for the sake of his brother, Balarāma, who would not quietly brook such an insult to his family. If this interpretation is not accepted it may be proposed in the alternative that the panel represents the fight between Indrajit and Lakshmaṇa, who is narrated sometimes as fighting perched on the shoulders of the monkey chief Hanumat.

A relief (No. 49) showing two figures standing side by side, each with a bow and, perhaps, with a pack of arrows, may be identified probably with Rāma and Lakshmaṇa of the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic. A panel (No. 55) again in the western wall depicts, perhaps, the fight between Bāli and Sugrīva probably, as Dikshit suggests, for the possession of Tārā, who is here seen in the arms of Bāli. The hero, with the garland, hurling a missile is, no doubt, Sugrīva, while the falling figure, perhaps, Aṅgada, son of Bāli, who came to help his father in the fight. A third relief (No. 8) in the north-eastern wall, with the figure of a monkey carrying loads of stone on his two upraised hands and on the head, is no doubt connected with the story of the construction of the bridge across the sea for Rāma and his monkey troops to cross over to Laṅkā. A fourth panel (No. 59) in the north-eastern wall may again be connected with some minor theme of the *Rāmāyaṇa* war. In it may be seen two figures, one monkey-faced to proper left and the other with



beard and grinning teeth (*rākshasa* ?) to proper right, fighting each other. The monkey is seen wringing the neck of the *rākshasa* with one hand and dealing blows at him with the other. The *rākshasa* with club in one hand is found to be in great agony and trying his utmost to free himself from the deadly grasp of his antagonist. Another dwarf figure is seen lying prostrate between the legs of the monkey. The overpowering strength of the monkey and the immense agony of the *rākshasa* have been masterfully expressed in this crude and coarse sculpture which, for such a lively portrayal, is worthy of unstinted praise. It should be noted, however, that the panel has been differently described by Dikshit<sup>10</sup> who finds in it a representation of a fight between *asuras*, such as that between Sunda and Upasunda, a theme of the *Devī* legend. Its association with a *Rāmāyaṇa* episode seems, however, to be the more probable. On the reverse side of this relief there appears a mutilated figure of Kubera, the god of wealth.

A *rākshasa*, with three visible heads and curls of hair rising upward, appears again in a relief (No. 57) in the north-western wall in the act of offering something to a sacrificial fire on an altar to his right. In his left hand there is a long staff. Beneath the altar may be seen a female figure squatting and offering a pot, full of offerings, to the *rākshasa*. A jar may again be seen at the bottom to the extreme left. Over the fire is to be seen a human figure in the attitude of flying or of coming out of the fire. In the *Rāmāyaṇa* we come by a *rākshasa* Triśirā (one with three heads) by name. Can the panel be associated, in any way, with him ? The *Devī-Bhāgavata* (VI. 1, 2) relates the story of one Triśirā who was created by Tvashtā in order to spite Indra. Triśirā is said to read the Vedas with one face, to drink wine with the second and to watch all quarters simultaneously with the third head. He lived a life of piety and performed severe austerities. Apprehending that Triśirā might oust him from his position of the lordship of the heaven, Indra first tried to seduce him with the help of his *apsarasas*, and when this failed Indra killed Triśirā with his *vajra*. It is not impossible that this sculpture may represent the austerities of Triśirā, as described in the *Devī-Bhāgavata*. An extremely weathered panel (No. 56), showing a figure on a chariot fighting with another figure, probably a bird with outspread wings, may also have some connection, as Dikshit thinks,

FIG. 21



with the *Rāmāyaṇa* story of the fight between Rāvaṇa and Jaṭāyu at the time of the abduction of Sītā.

According to Dikshit<sup>12</sup> Kṛishṇa's fight with Kaṃsa has been depicted in a panel (No. 12) which shows a group of four figures. He describes the two figures in the left field as Kṛishṇa and Balarāma, the third as Kaṃsa who is being dragged by the hair by Kṛishṇa, and the fourth as a mere onlooker. It is difficult to say, however, whether any actual dragging by the hair is intended to be portrayed here. Moreover, the two principal figures are each characterised by matted locks tied upward, and do not show the *kāka-paksha* hair, usual with the figures of Kṛishṇa and Balarāma in the Pāhārpur sculptures. The matted hair on the head of each indicates these figures to be representations of ascetics, and it is not impossible to suggest, from the attitude and pose of the central figure, that one of them is in the act of blessing the third who is bending down to receive it. It is not unlikely that the two ascetic figures represent Rāma and Lakshmaṇa. The incident depicted in the panel is probably that of the meeting of Bharata and Śatrughṇa with Rāma and Lakshmaṇa in exile, when Rāma comforted Bharata and sent him back to Ayodhyā with his blessings.

Several elegant dancing poses may again be recognised among the sculptures of this group at Pāhārpur. An extremely weathered relief (No. 10) in the north-eastern wall shows a dancing female figure, cross-legged and in a pleasant triple flexion. The attitude reminds us of that in the early dryad figures, as at Sāñchī. Her left hand is raised up while the right is held before the face. These fine gestures of the hands add movement and rhythm to the graceful attitude of the figure as a whole, balanced further by the fluttering end of the garment on either side. An almost similar panel (No. 58) in the same wall depicts again a female figure with the hands shown as if beating cymbals to keep time in tune with the dance. This may also be regarded as a praiseworthy piece of sculpture, so far as movement and expression are concerned. The hair coiled up and forming a mass behind the head is also worth noticing. A violent pose, perhaps that of a momentary pause in the whirl of the dance, may be recognised in a relief (No. 25) on the south-eastern wall. Here we find a dancer with forcefully bent kness, right arm with palm outward swinging



across the body, left shoulder and arm raised, with the forearm (palm inwards) 'loosely pending from the bent upper arm,' and the head violently bent towards the right. The fluttering ends of the garment, the raised folds of the *dhoti*, the highly strung eye-brows, the hair coiled up against the left shoulder and the forceful attitude all accentuate the vigour of the movement. "The entire composition," says Kramrisch,<sup>13</sup> "and the entire figure are borne by the dance." Another female figure, standing cross-legged in *tribhaṅga* and with two hands raised up above the head and holding some rectangular object, as seen in a panel (No. 28), may, again, represent some particular attitude of the *Nṛityaśāstra*. But this cannot be said to be as elegant as the other three.

Several figures of *dvāra-pālas* (door-keepers) are also worth mentioning in this context. Each of them stands with the weight resting on the staff and wears curly wigs on their heads. A rather fine example may be recognised in a relief (No. 9) in the north-eastern wall. Here we find a person standing on his right leg with the left tucked up and resting on the right knee. His whole weight rests on his staff which he clutches at the top with joined hands over which, with a slight bend of his body, he rests his chin. The attitude is rather common with a door-keeper when, in the midst of his tiring watch, he snatches a little rest, or even a nap, in such a position. It means no little credit to the artist who has been able to catch this characteristic pose and to delineate it in so fine and naturalistic a manner. A peculiar ornament, showing an object like a dog's tooth fastened to the ankle by a string, is also worthy of notice. A second *dvāra-pāla* figure in a relief (No. 36) in the southern wall has his staff broken away in the lower portion. The figure is distinguished by a pair of boots covering the feet. Both these figures are shown in three-quarter profile. A full front view may be seen in another relief (No. 27) in the south-eastern wall where we find an extremely merry figure, standing with the hands on the top of the staff, shown to the right. Dikshit<sup>14</sup> is inclined to associate these figures also with the *Kṛishṇa* myth when he suggests that such *dvāra-pālas* may represent guards of *Kaṁsa's* prison in which *Vasudeva* and *Devakī* were thrown.

There are also several amatory couples represented among the sculptures of this group. They lack however the restraint

FIG. 32

FIG. 34



FIG. 35

and elegance of the so-called Rādhā-Kṛishṇa group. Nor are the figures distinguished by halos, and it appears probable that the reliefs bearing such couples represent mere amatory scenes. One of these reliefs (No. 14) shows a male figure, with his right hand round the neck of a female standing to his right, and the left engaged in pressing her breast. The female figure in *tribhaṅga* appears to be almost hanging by her left hand passing round the neck of her lover. The right hand is broken away at the forearm. Of the ornaments, the broad knob piercing the left ear of the female figure needs mention and should be compared to the almost similar tops, still used by the rustic maidens of North Bengal. A dwarfish figure, perhaps a female, appears to the proper left of the panel with a fly-whisk in the right hand. The expression of face of each figure is masterful. Smilingly, yet bashfully, the female steals an affectionate look at her lord, who also feels quite happy in the company of his lady. The male figure has an arrow-case at the back, and in view of this it is possible that the pair represent Kāma and his wife Rati. Another such relief (No. 16) shows the pair in a still closer and intimate pose, almost on the point of exchanging kisses, while a third (No. 11) shows a couple in close embrace feeding each other. The male figure is seen actually feeding the female, and it is probable that the female is taking food from a plate, proffered by an attendant to her right, to feed the male in her turn.

Besides, there are other sculptures, representing a variety of subjects, popular stories, incidents from everyday life, etc. in this group at Pāhārpur. The figures being extremely weathered it is not always possible to ascertain their correct themes. Yet, a naturalistic expression and a pleasing sense of movement and action are apparent in every piece. There are several conversational pairs of which one (No. 51) depicts two ascetics, distinguished by *jaṭā-mukuta*s (one of them is bearded and emaciated), perhaps absorbed in the most abstruse metaphysical discussion. Dikshit<sup>15</sup> thinks it likely that the relief, if it has anything to do with the Kṛishṇa legend, "represents the meeting of sage Garga with Nanda, when the former communicated the prophecy about the child Kṛishṇa." In another panel (No. 20) we find an ascetic (as is known by the *jaṭā-mukuta*) perhaps explaining something to a layman who can be recognised by his curly wigs. In a third



panel (No. 21) a pair of *kinnaras* appear to be enjoying a pleasant chat, while in a fourth (No. 26) we find a person assuring and comforting a fellow who stands with bent knees and clasped hands. The fifth (No. 7) shows us a pair of which the person to proper left, with a club and sword, appears to be threatening the other person who, however, seems to pay little heed to the threats. An expression of immense fright at something which makes him recoil has been faithfully portrayed in the face and attitude of a figure (No. 47)<sup>16</sup> in the south-western wall. Fun and frolic, again, are stamped on the face of a boyish figure (No. 6). A *vidyādhara*, with boots and a garland in his hands, appears in a panel (No. 18) in an attitude of flight. Another relief (No. 52) on the south-western wall, portraying a woman standing with crossed legs and grasping the branches of a tree above, with a child to her right with the left elbow on her hip and further out a man with his right hand touching his lips, has some compositional affinity with the scene of the Nativity of the Buddha in the Lumbini garden and might have been an attempt by a Pāhārpur artist to delineate that sacred incident.

FIG. 36

Of all the sculptures on the basement wall of the Pāhārpur temple there is only one which may be found to have a definite Buddhist association. This is an image of Padmapāṇi Avalokiteśvara (No. 38) fixed to the middle of the main southern wall. The god stands in rigid *samapada-sthānaka* and has two hands, the left holding a lotus by the stalk and the right, broken away, disposed, perhaps, in *varada*. Two attendant figures stand on two sides, but they are too mutilated to admit of any identification. The head of the god is surrounded by a lotus halo and the stela, which is rounded at the top, is fringed by two courses of ornamental borders. The disposition of the niche containing the image evidently indicates it to be a later insertion. The sculpture belongs also the early Pāla epoch and bears all the early characteristics of that school, namely composition, separate lotus pedestals for the attendant figures and rounded stela. That the image was intended for special veneration is also clear from the masonry *kunḍa* that had been built in front of it.



## REFERENCES

1. *Vasudevaḥ Kāṁsa-bhayād = Yasodā-śayane'nayat* |  
*Agni-purāṇa*, chap. 12; for details *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, X, chap. 3; *Hari-vaṁśa*, chap. 59; *Vishṇu-purāṇa*, V, chap. 3.
2. *Paharpur*, pl. XXXIII. d.
3. Dikshit describes the relief as the representation of a man being roughly handled by boys, perhaps Kṛishṇa and his companions. *Paharpur*, p. 51.
4. *Rāma-Kṛishṇau cheratus = tau gobhir = gopālakaiḥ saha* |  
*Agni-purāṇa*, chap. 12.
5. *Śakrotsavaṁ parityajya kārīto gotra-yajñakāḥ* |  
*Parvataṁ dhārayitvā tu Śakrad = vṛishṭiṛ = nivāritaḥ* | |  
*Namaskṛito Mahendrena Govindo'th = ārjuno'rpitaḥ* |  
*Indrotsavas = tu tushṭena bhūyaḥ Kṛishṇena kārītaḥ* | |  
*Agni-purāṇa*, chap. 12. For details *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, X, chap. 25; *Vishṇu-purāṇa*, V, chap. 11.
6. *Harivaṁśa*, chap. 64.
7. *Vishṇu-purāṇa*, V., chap. 9.
8. *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, X, chap. 16.
9. *Saṅkarshaṇaṁ tu skandhena śighram = utkshipya dānavaḥ* |  
*Na tasthau prajagām = aiva sa-chandra iva jaladaḥ* | |  
*Vishṇu-purāṇa*, V, chap. 9.
10. *Paharpur*, p. 53.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
13. Stella Kramrisch, *Indian Sculpture*, p. 183, fig. 80.
14. *Paharpur*, p. 40.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
16. Dikshit describes the figure as a musician with a lyre. *Paharpur*, p. 51.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

### TERRACOTTAS

Earth or clay has been regarded as the primeval plastic material not only because of its ready availability, but also on account of its easy tractability. It is the passive, i.e. the least-resisting, material that lends itself to shape very easily. It satisfies thus the creative impulse of the ordinary man, as much for aesthetic expression as for domestic and ritualistic needs. A more or less durable form is imparted to productions in clay, either through hardening by exposure in the sun or by firing. Burnt clay or terracotta has thus served as an easy and convenient plastic material from time immemorial.

In the riverine plains of Bengal terracotta constituted, as it does even now, the common and most popular medium of the artistic expression of the people, certainly from the earliest times. This is evident from the fairly abundant number of terracotta figurines that have been discovered from the few ancient sites that had been explored up till now. Unfortunately, proper records and data with regard to the stratigraphical evidence of such discoveries are extremely meagre, if not lacking altogether. Again, many of the significant terracotta figurines, relevant for a study of this art, represent accidental finds and no accurate data with regard to the strata of their discoveries are available. What is required is an assortment, on the evidence of stratigraphy, of the numerous terracotta objects that are usually found in course of a scientific excavation of an ancient site. It is a good sign that the Archaeological Department of the Government of India are devoting greater attention to the proper recording of stratigraphical evidence, and when this is done one can, perhaps, expect to classify scientifically the terracotta finds from the different ancient sites. Their sequence may help one to determine the evolution of Indian terracotta style in general, and on this basis an evolutionary sequence also of the finds in the different regions. In the present state of our knowledge the absence of such scientific data is being keenly felt.



To a scientific observer it may appear that a complete and comprehensive charting of terracotta finds on the evidence of stratigraphy is expected to determine satisfactorily a sequence of the vast mass of Indian terracotta figurines from the various sites. There are, however, serious difficulties in this process. The recording of stratigraphical evidence in the earlier excavations had been perfunctory and arbitrary to a certain degree. In view of our actual experience stratigraphical evidence, even if correctly recorded, can be expected to furnish little conclusive data with regard to the date of a particular object. As it now is, there are evidences of objects, apparently belonging to different dates, being found in the same level of occupation, or of a later piece being recorded from a level lower than that of a find of an earlier date. There might be various reasons for such circumstances. A tiny piece, as the terracotta objects generally are, is likely to be disturbed from its original level due to some confusion underground, either by some actions of men or of nature. It was the practice, again, to preserve such objects in households, even for centuries, before being discarded when damaged. It is not unlikely, hence, that objects of different dates should be found accumulated in the same pit. It is because of these circumstances that Kramrisch significantly observes, "there is no such thing so far as terracottas are concerned as a Maurya level, etc."<sup>1</sup> In spite of all these, we cannot, without a due consideration, brush aside stratigraphical evidence which may be found helpful for a general scheme of classification. But that should wait till complete and comprehensive scientific data are accumulated. The evidence of terracotta technique and its gradual advance may, under the circumstances, be utilised for a clue to an approximate sequence of terracotta objects. It may be found possible, perhaps, to establish a course of evolution of terracotta art on this basis. But here too some caution must need be used, as will be indicated later on. The affinity of terracotta form with that of the plastic style in stone of known date may also offer a certain clue to the relative age of a particular object.

Terracotta art, it has already been stated, had been a favourite and popular idiom in Bengal from the earliest times. Beside the large-sized works in stone the terracotta objects may appear to be slight and tiny. But what they lack in size is amply compensated



for by the more abundant productions which indicate a more extensive and popular idiom of plastic expression. A variety of significant forms and motifs may be found in terracotta. Its use was extensive and purposes varied. Objects and artifacts in terracotta were intended chiefly for domestic use and worship, for household decoration, for children's toys, for popular religious and magical practices. Seals were made out of that material for purposes of documentation and such seals bear in their engravings the impress of an artistic impulse of the people. The poor and the humble folk satisfied their craving for personal decoration by fashioning delightful ornaments in terracotta. In brick architecture—and in Bengal this kind of architecture was specially favoured because of the lack of stone—terracotta served as the most suitable and convenient material for decorating and diversifying the exterior walls, not only by variegated mouldings of different shapes and patterns, but also by continuous dados of plaques. Apart from aesthetic significance the terracotta art, in its varied uses and applications, supply invaluable data for a study of the life and culture of the people.

A study of Indian terracottas leads to their division into two broad, but well-defined, groups—one indicating a primitive form and experience and the other showing the impress and formulations of stylistic advance natural to a progressive art movement in a chronological sequence. In form and technique the former differs but little from the terracotta figurines of the proto-historic Indus civilisations. What is further interesting is the fact that the primitive type has been found in association with the other, and that terracotta objects of the primitive type are also being fashioned out by the rural people even in the present day. An eminent scholar, hence, describes this type as "ageless" in distinction to the other which is designated as the "timed variation".<sup>2</sup> The products of the ageless type seem to be as important as those of the timed variation for a comprehensive study of terracotta art. It should, however, be emphasised at the outset that in the absence of any proper mode of chronological or stylistic grouping it would be rather a hazardous task to impute any chronology to the products of the ageless type, except in a few instances where the evidence of fashions in dress and ornaments might furnish a clue as to their relative chronological position.



Among the early terracotta objects and artifacts found in Bengal both these types are clear and explicit. The first, however, cannot be dated earlier than the second century B.C., as examples of this type are mostly known to have been found in association with objects with clear affiliations to the Śunga art idiom or to idioms that are even later.

The ageless type, whether representing a human figure or an animal, is characterised by a modelling that reduces the form to a simple description of the main volumes of the figure corresponding to the principal parts of the body, such as the head, the torso and the hands and the feet. The human figures are fashioned entirely by the hand by means of such rough and ready devices as flattening and rounding the body, pinching up and pressing down soft clay according to the requirements of the form, and drawing the ends of the limbs into conical points—all done by the simple pressure of the fingers. Eyes, lips, ears, navel, hair, etc. are indicated either by mere scratches or incisions, or by strips and pellets separately fashioned and applied on the summarily modelled form. The *appliqué* technique is also employed for delineating ornaments and head-dresses, and usually the form is burdened with them. Most of the human figurines represent females with heavy and bulging hips and prominent rounded breasts, sometimes with the navel and abdomen clearly marked. They seem to be associated with the primitive conception of a mother or fertility goddess.

The animal figurines of this group represent mostly horse, elephant and ram, and like the human figurines, were fashioned by the hand. The modelling is reduced to cylinders, cones and kindred geometrical shapes representing their bodies and limbs. Like the human figurines, again, ornaments, trappings, etc. and also such features as the ears, manes (in case of the horse) and horns (in case of the ram) were separately fashioned and applied. Clay and terracotta figures of horses and elephants were often offered to village deities, as they are even today, and the practice appears to have been wide-spread throughout the country. There is a plausibility also in the suggestion of Kramrisch that such animal figurines were intended as mounts (*vāhanas*) of the divinities, and that such figures in early Indian art might stand for the symbols of the deities concerned.



The terracotta figurines of the ageless type, it has already been observed, were made entirely by the hand; but with the time-bound group the mould also comes into use. Nearly every ancient site that has been explored in Bengal has yielded a fairly large number of terracotta objects of varied shapes and forms. They constitute, perhaps, only a fraction of the total production in this medium. The more abundant centres are Tāmralipti (Tamluk in the Midnapur district), Berāchampā and Harinārāyanpur (Twenty-four Parganas district), Gītagrām (Murshidābād district), Bāngarh and Mahāsthān (North Bengal). Besides, stray and isolated finds have also been recorded from other places. The artistic movement in terracotta thus seems to have been extensive and wide-spread throughout the whole of Bengal, and what is interesting is the fact that figurines of both the ageless and the time-bound groups have been usually found in association with each other.

The fairly large number of objects, unearthed up till now, indicates a wide range of probabilities within the time-bound group. The earliest in this series appear to be those in which the faces are found to have been impressed from moulds with the hair, head-dresses and even ears separately made and added. The heads, thus fashioned, were affixed to the bodies modelled by the hand exactly in the process that we notice in the figurines of the ageless type. The drapery and ornaments on the body are also applied. The additive mode of figure composition, so tenacious in the ageless type, seems to have been the predominant technique also in this group, only the face and, to a certain extent, the accessories showing such characteristics that might indicate clues to their relative chronology. The additive technique in terracotta art, it should be emphasised, has been the most persistent, and figurines with moulded faces and modelled bodies are known to have survived in all phases of terracotta art even up to the present day.<sup>3</sup>

With regard to Indian terracottas the problem of chronology, for reasons already stated, is a much controversial one, and differences of opinion are, not unoften, considerable. Scholars generally hold that terracottas with modelled bodies and moulded faces and with jewellery and apparel affixed were characteristic of Maurya terracotta art. This view gains some plausibility from



the find of a standing female figurine and two detached heads from the ancient site of Bulandi Bāgh "in the dark blue soil enveloping the ancient wooden rampart" of the Maurya city of Pāṭaliputra.<sup>4</sup> Another standing female figurine of an identical conception has also been recovered from the same site in a later excavation.<sup>5</sup> These bear the distinct impress of the aforesaid technique and the fact that they were discovered in definite Māurya context may lend some conviction to the assignment of such terracotta figurines to the epoch of the Mauryas. Objects of similar conception have been discovered also as a result of accidental diggings in the ancient city of Pāṭaliputra, and it is not unreasonable to hold, therefore, that the technique was characteristic of Maurya terracotta art. Elsewhere, the author has described the characteristic traits of this art and has suggested the possibility of the persistence of this technique also in the subsequent Śuṅga epoch.<sup>6</sup>

From Bengal there have been discovered at least two significant terracotta figurines which appear to be related to those of the Maurya conception, though there is hardly any other evidence to date them in the Maurya age. Both of them represent standing female figurines and are nearly complete. One of them<sup>7</sup> hails from Tamluk (Midnapur district, Bengal). Tamluk represents the site of the ancient seaport city of Tāmralipti and is recently proved to have been an active centre of ancient terracotta art. Innumerable terracottas have been found from this site, usually in association with ancient cast coins of copper, and hence an early date for these productions can easily be inferred. In the terracotta figurine under examination the face appears to have been pressed from a mould and affixed to the separately modelled body. The left hand is *akimbo*, and the right is stretched along the side in a curve parallel to the drapery which spreads out about the waist. The drapery is composed of *appliqué* plaques, separately modelled and then affixed, and consists of a hooped skirt, held by a belt, and a scarf. The lower part of the figure including the legs is broken. The ornaments are heavy and in *appliqué*. Conspicuous among these are a neck collar, knobbed ear ornaments, a headgear (partially preserved) and bracelets of round discs. The hair is parted in the middle above the forehead and is arranged in two hoops on the sides. There is a lesser number of ornaments than is usual in figurines of this group, and this

FIG. 37



fact enables one to determine clearly the essentials of its modelling and composition. The head is delicately modelled with soft and subdued shadows adding charm to the full and rounded face. The bust, likewise, is perfect in modelling and such qualities of modelling are enhanced by the contrast presented by the primitive technique of *appliqué* plaques for garment and jewellery. This terracotta figurine from Tamluk has a clear affinity with the two standing female figurines from Bulandi Bāgh, mentioned above, and may be classed with them chronologically as well as stylistically.

A chance exploration at Pokharṇā in the district of Bānkurā (Bengal) has yielded, again, a terracotta female figurine<sup>8</sup> which essentially resembles the Tamluk specimen in technique, style as well as in form, though lacking in its finish, perhaps due to extreme corrosion. The execution also seems to be on an inferior level. In conception, however, the Pokharṇā figurine, now deposited in the Asutosh Museum of Indian art, Calcutta University, appears to be related to the Tamluk and Bulandi Bāgh ones, but belongs, possibly, to a later date.

The terracottas with moulded faces and modelled bodies are followed by miniature plaques, each bearing a figure or figures in relief, entirely produced from moulds and then touched up and finished before firing. Such plaques have come up from various ancient sites of India. Recent explorations in the riparian districts of West Bengal have also yielded a large number of terracotta plaques of this class. In this series also it is the female figurines that predominate. A large proportion of these terracotta plaques may be assigned to the Śuṅga-Kāṇva period, roughly second and first centuries B.C. In this group also a chronological and stylistic sequence may be determined on the basis of the advancement of plastic diction. The earlier ones are apparently those that are characterised, as in the contemporary plastic movement in stone, by flattened reliefs, heavy forms and harsh linear schemes. Soon they give place to pleasing specimens in which the reliefs are higher, the forms more refined and more sensitively modelled, the lines more disciplined, and the contours and the gradation of planes better regulated. As a rule, the figures are heavily coiffured and wear elaborate apparel and jewellery concealing, to a certain extent, the loveliness of the delicately



modelled body. The types are considerably varied and in the abundant terracottas of this group with their varied modes of coiffure, dress and jewellery one may find ample materials for a study of the fashions and tastes of the time.

The various ancient sites of Bengal, it has already been observed, have yielded a very large number of terracottas of this group, and in this general study of early Bengal sculpture it is not possible to refer even to the principal ones among the varied types that have been recovered up till now. It is proposed to confine our attention, hence, to a few significant examples as epitomising the qualities and characteristics of terracotta art of Bengal of this phase. The abundance of materials and the varieties in types and forms call for a separate and independent treatment which, it is hoped, may be attempted in the near future.

Tamluk had been a very active centre of ancient terracotta art and finds of early terracottas have occasionally been recorded since a long time. Recently there has been found an abundant number of fragmentary terracotta forms a few of which may prove to be of considerable interest. Among the Tamluk terracottas mention should particularly be made of an almost complete plaque, the like of which is seldom to be found in the entire range of Indian terracotta art. It represents a discovery made long ago and had been lying forgotten for more than half a century. When it was again brought to the notice of scholars a wrong inference was made in respect of its findspot.<sup>9</sup> It will be found useful, hence, to discuss this interesting object in greater detail.

FIG. 38

The plaque was found in four fragments, and these fragments, fitted together, form an almost complete female figure except for the feet and the ankles. A highly ornate specimen, the female figure is overloaded with elaborate jewellery and rich apparel. It is remarkably well preserved and the surface is very little worn. The entire plaque was evidently produced from a mould and was later on touched up and finished with a scraper or knife. The ornamental details were made with stamps and were carefully finished afterwards. The relief is full, though the face because of the exuberance of ornaments and coiffure, appears rather flattened.

A large variety of ornaments and decorative motifs was employed in this highly interesting terracotta plaque. The background is found to be stamped over with numerous twelve-



pointed and six-pointed rosaces. Apart from this ornament of the background, the figure itself wears elaborate burdens of coiffure and jewellery, and it may be found worth while to quote from the excellent description of Professor Johnston.<sup>10</sup>

"The head-dress is elaborate; the hair itself seems to be enclosed in a close-fitting bonnet (or fillet), bordered with four rows of beads and terminating in two flower tassels, the frontal hair being just visible.<sup>11</sup> . . . . . On each side of the bonnet are two turban-like rolls of cloth, each bound with a belt and highly ornate. The left-hand one, which is the larger in accordance with the usual practice of this class of figure, is made up of five vertical strips with dependent tassels or strings of beads at regular intervals, while the right-hand one appears to be in a single piece, embellished with six rows of a flower ornament between which are strings of beads. Stuck into the latter are five emblems. . . . . Their exact identification would perhaps help us to guess whom the figure represents. The lowest is an *aṅkuśa* . . . and the middle one an axe. The two on each side of the latter are of the *triśūla* shape, familiar to us from Sanchi and other sites, the lower one being surmounted by a crown and the upper by a trinagular piece; possibly they are two types of *vajra*, . . . The top emblem might be a flag, a *dhvaja* . . . or some kind of chopper. Each of the five has a string of six beads hanging from the top. Emblems of this type are frequently referred to in literature, though often difficult to identify on the monuments. A terracotta plaque, recently found at Kosām and now in the Indian Museum, Calcutta, shows the same series and presumably represented the same goddess; it is in a much poorer condition and less complete than our figure. On the north gate of Sanchi there are to be seen two bracelets of similar symbols. . . . These two series include the *aṅkuśa* and *vajra*, but give no help towards the identification of the other emblems. Between the masses of the turban rises a crown with five rows of star-shaped ornaments, presumably a jewelled cap containing the hair. A similar, but larger, crown occurs several times on the Śuṅga railing at Bodhgaya, and the head-dresses of the same general type are not uncommon in the art of the Śuṅga period, both sculpture and terracotta. The ears have two large circular highly decorated rolls, that in the right ear being shown side view, and the other one frontally; from each hang a number



of tassels or strings of beads. These rolls again are familiar as was known from many recently discovered terracottas. Round the neck is a heavy necklace, the details of which are rather worn and unimportant."

The dress is also elaborately represented and according to Professor Johnston admits of two possible interpretations. It appears to consist either of a sleeveless tunic, fastened to the waist by a girdle and reaching down to the knees with an under-skirt that extends nearly to the ankles, or of a single garment with flounces. The former alternative seems to be a correct description of the dress worn by the figure. The dress passes over the left shoulder, but leaves the right shoulder bare. A narrow border is indicated by the top part of the dress. Close-set shallow lines, apparently made by a comb-like implement, indicate the folds. At the bottom appear two series of bead strings ending in tassels. In the upper part of the strings may be seen four paunchy figures, two shown on each thigh, squatting on haunches and with the hands raised to the heads. Similar figures are also found to appear in the same positions on a terracotta figure, said to have been collected from Kauśāmbī and once in the Ow-Wachendorf collection. Around the hips is a girdle in three rows, the upper and lower of gadrooned beads and the central one of small circular medallions. This girdle seems to be held in position by the hands and possibly with a fastening or support indicated by a small flat object above the top row in the centre. Professor Johnston thinks it rather curious that such a girdle should be worn above the drapery, but this practice appears to have been widely in vogue as is apparent from the evidence supplied by terracotta figurines and by stone statuary as well. The under-skirt, which reaches down to the ankles, has also close-set shallow lines indicative of the folds. Besides, a broad ribbon passes over the left shoulder and round the left hip, like a bandolier, with four figures, possibly intended as amulets. Professor Johnston describes them as a pair of fish, a bird (with the head broken), a sleeping doe and a *makara*. Bead strings are suspended to the ribbon and the amulets, and one or more scarves are shown passing over the right and left upper arms and terminating on a level with the knees. The upper arms are bare, but the lower arms have each four heavy bracelets.



The general affinity of this plaque with the Indian Museum and the Ow-Wachendorf specimens, said to have been recovered from Kauśāmbī, led Professor Johnston and, following him, other scholars to suggest that this remarkable piece hailed also from the same site. Our lengthy discussion regarding the discovery and findspot of this piece proves this suggestion to be a mere assumption, and there seems to be no doubt any longer that this outstanding terracotta figure originally came from Tamluk, the famous Tāmralipti of the ancient days. Among the recent Tamluk finds, now in the Asutosh Museum of Indian Art, Calcutta University, there may be recognised at least two fragments which are closely identical to the piece under examination in all important details. From Harinārāyaṇpur and Berāchāmpā have been recovered closely allied terracotta figurines. The type appears to have been characteristic of lower Bengal, and if a suggestion may be hazarded we should like to say that the Indian Museum and the Ow-Wachendorf specimens also probably hailed from some part of lower Bengal. From associated objects and from the indications, noted above, the Tamluk figurine appears to be dated in the second century B. C.

FIG. 39

With regard to the identification of this remarkable terracotta figurine divergent views are held. Such views are, more or less tentative, and no definite conclusion is possible on this point in the present state of our knowledge. From the emblems worn as crests Professor Kramrisch describes the figure as representing the *apsaras* Pañchachūdā produced at the churning of the ocean, as described in the *Mahābhārata* and in the *Purāṇas*. Professor Johnston, however, summarily rejects this view with the observation that the figures of *apsaras* should be shown as nude whereas the lady represented by this figurine wears elaborate drapery. He discusses at length the question of identification. From the analogy of the bandolier with amulets, found in several objects with votive significance from the Near East, he thinks that this figure might also have a similar significance. "It looks", he says, "as if we are dealing with the cult of a mother goddess, which we know was wide spread over the Near East, and indeed over most of the then known world at this time, and which seems to have prevailed in India from time immemorial, to judge from archeological evidence available in the last twenty years." He cites a



reference to a goddess, called Māyā, in the *Saundarananda Kāvya* of Aśvaghosha. He significantly points out further the mention of an Indian Mother Goddess, Maiya, in the Oxyrhynchus Papyrus, No. 1820, where this goddess is invoked as bringing the flood in the Ganges. The goddess, referred to as Maiya in the Papyrus, appears to be the same as Māyā of Aśvaghosha, and from the description of the Papyrus she is known to have been worshipped in the Gangetic basin as a goddess especially associated with rain and fertility. Though he was not quite definite, Professor Johnston thinks that "such an identification meets the requirements of the case, and that, if it is the wrong answer, the right one, when found, will be of similar character." These observations of Professor Johnston seem to be quite apposite in view of the popularity of this type of goddess in the lower Gangetic basin, as we have shown above.

FIG. 40

Another interesting type of divinity may be seen in the terracotta mould of a winged male figure<sup>12</sup> discovered, again, from Tamluk and now a precious possession of the Asutosh Museum of Indian Art. Stylistically assignable to Śuṅga epoch, it represents a male figure, either a *yaksha* or a god, standing facing in rigid *samapada-sthānaka* attitude. The two arms are shown *akimbo* and hold two stalks with lotus blossoms. Two wings are shown on the shoulders and the figure wears ear-studs, a heavy neck collar and bracelets. A terracotta plaque showing the upper part of a similar winged male figure<sup>13</sup> has also been recovered from Berāchāmpā (Twenty-four Parganas) and may be assigned to the same epoch. These may be compared to two terracotta plaques (one complete<sup>14</sup> and another fragmentary<sup>15</sup>), each showing a winged female figure, discovered from Basārḥ (Vaiśālī, North Bihar). The winged male and female figures, shown respectively on these plaques, appear each in identical setting, and a significant relation apparently exists between the two. They appear to represent the male and female counterparts of the same divine concept. Two other later representations of the winged goddess may also be found, one in a bronze specimen from Akhun Dheri, possibly of Kushāṇa date, and the other of a similar date in a stone relief from Mathurā.<sup>16</sup> Terracotta plaques showing representations of a winged female figure seem to be fairly popular in the art of this phase and two other fragmentary ex-



amples are known to have been discovered within the last few years, one from Tamluk and another from Kauśāmbī.

The wealth and variety of terracotta objects discovered within recent years from different sites in lower Bengal are considerable. To these may be added the objects that had been previously found from Mahāsthān, Bāngarh and Birol in North Bengal, Sābhār in Dacca (East Bengal), Gitagrām and Rāṅgāmāṭī in Murshidābād and a few other sites in different regions of Bengal. This vast mass of materials precludes even a brief treatment of the principal types and forms within the scope of this short monograph. The individual figurines represent mostly *yakshīs* and *yakshas* as well as other divine beings. Apart from individual figurines, *mithuna* plaques are also not uncommon, while a fairly large number, especially hailing from lower Bengal, consists of narrative reliefs. Among these narrative reliefs there may be recognised faint echoes of *Jātaka* and other stories. In this connection reference may be made to a fragmentary plaque recovered from Mahāsthān<sup>17</sup> (Bogra district, North Bengal, East Pakistan) depicting the scene of Dushyanta's hunting in Kaṇva's hermitage, so graphically related in Kālidāsa's *Abhijñāna Śakuntalam*. An earlier and simpler version of the story is to be found in the *Mahābhārata*. In the plaque under review we find a personage of lordly bearing driving in a chariot with a drawn bow, and with a flock of deer fleeing in front. A few terracotta plaques from lower Bengal appear to have some association with certain episodes of the *Jātaka* tales; but in view of the fragmentary condition of the plaques it is difficult to identify definitely the particular stories from which such episodes have been selected for representation. It is also possible that a complete story was represented, as in the later brick temples of the territory, in a series of plaques. No exact identification is possible, hence, unless the missing ones of a particular series are available. The mode of narration seems to be the same as that followed in contemporary stone reliefs, described elsewhere in detail by the present writer.

FIG. 43

The terracotta figurines of this period, it has already been observed, were cast from moulds. In a few instances the ancient moulds have been discovered, and apart from those, referred to above, two other moulds have also been found at Bāngarh<sup>18</sup>



(Dinājpur district, North Bengal), one along with its ancient impression. Again, terracotta figurines, not a few in number, found at a particular site, are found to be identical in size and form, in stance and bearing, in ornaments and drapery, and such pieces appear to have been produced from the same mould or moulds. This, along with the fact of the survival of the ancient moulds through all these centuries may indicate that such moulds were prepared not for a single casting only, but for many, and were preserved for future use. The actual age of a terracotta piece cast from such a mould may not, hence, always correspond to that indicated by the general style.

- FIG. 42 In the Śaka-Kushāṇa phase artistic activities in terracotta seem to be as abundant and wide-spread as in the earlier epoch, and their repertoire as varied. Along with the themes and subjects, already known, new ethnic types are introduced in the terracotta art of this period, a clear reflection, no doubt, of the racial influx that was characteristic of the period. Moreover, we find also representations of a number of homely scenes and popular stories. The active centres of terracotta art of this period were also those that we have already referred to in connection with this art of the earlier epoch. The plastic diction of the earlier trend seems to be continued and developed resulting in a physical form, slender and refined, and with rounded features, melting planes and flowing contours. In this phase also the female figures predominate and in their general bearing and stances, in the treatment of the dresses and ornaments and in the fulness of their features, soft and rounded to a point of sensuous grace, they clearly betoken distinct affiliation with the Kushāṇa idiom in its human and worldly concept. The drapery is entirely diaphanous and the features clearly shine forth under the garment which is usually indicated at the lower end by a ring-like circle around the legs just above the ankles. These figurines usually stand in extremely flexible attitudes, attitudes which were rather unknown in the earlier Śuṅga-Kāṇva epoch, and it is only in the later phases of Kushāṇa art that such elasticity and pliability have been gradually achieved. The freely flowing contours and melting planes supply a rhythm in the multiplicity of bends the parallel of which can only be recognised in the *yakshiṇī* figures on the Bhutesar pillars at Mathurā. These terracotta figurines from Bengal may be said to have been related
- FIG. 44
- FIG. 41



to the plastic tradition of Mathurā, only in a general manner, however. The lush sensuality of Mathurā is found to be much subdued and refined in the slender body types represented by the terracotta figurines from Bengal. They illustrate poses of elegant ease, graceful relaxation and care-free langour indicative of a life, to a certain extent aristocratic and sophisticated.

Beyond a description of this general tenor of Kushāṇa terracotta art in Bengal, it is not possible for us to discuss, even in brief, the more important examples recovered from different parts of Bengal. Their number is too many and the types also are varied. The above observations seem to apply equally to all terracotta plaques, showing figures in relief either singly or in groups. In the Kushāṇa phase terracotta figurines in the round also appear to have come into use. Such figurines seem to have been produced from moulds, each in two pieces representing the front and the back, and then joined together. In this respect such terracotta figurines indicate an advance in the technique of terracotta art. A fragmentary terracotta female figurine<sup>19</sup> discovered from Birol (Rājshāhī district, North Bengal, East Pakistan), now in the collection of the author, may be referred to in this connection. It represents the head and bust of a young lady, shown fully in the round. The front side is, to a certain extent, abraided, the nose, the lips and the bust having suffered from concussion. The face is a perfect oval, the eyes are wide open and the cheeks rounded and full. The lady wears a short necklace which has two taurine ornaments just over the breasts. The spherical breasts, the sensitive modelling of the back lend to the figure an effect of warm and sensuous beauty, the distinguishing characteristic of the Mathurā *yakshīnīs*. The top of the head is broken away and the nature of the head-dress, if there was any, cannot be determined now. The hair is gathered in a neat plait which hangs down the back and is further adorned by a festoon of flowers in the upper section. The sturdy and well-modelled body, together with a sensitive treatment, reminds one of the superb *yakshīnī* figure from Didārganj (Patna), to be dated about the first century A. D. The latter, however, has a more sensitive modelling with a greater feeling for the texture of the living flesh.

Among the new ethnic types represented in terracotta art of this phase mention should be made of a fragmentary piece



showing the upper part of a seated male figure of boyish appearance.<sup>20</sup> The figure seems to be draped in a kind of cloak and has the two hands with clenched fists held fast to the body, the face is quite naturalistically modelled, and in the boyish countenance there is at the same time an appearance of serene dignity. The hair, free of all adornment, falls in curls along the temples and the forehead. Here we have a type, unknown in the vast range of Indian terracotta art, the likely parallels of which are to be found in the figures of the temple boys of ancient Greece. A Hellenistic physiognomy, discernible to a certain extent in the treatment of the face and of the body, and Hellenistic dress may indicate a foreign inspiration and of this assumption we have possibly a support in the fact that the piece was recovered from Tamluk, an international port of maritime commerce in those days. Another piece, probably part of a pottery,<sup>21</sup> shows two male heads addorsed with a ring above. It was also recovered from Tamluk and in its treatment a simplified version of that of the Roman portrait figures seems to have been followed. Un-Indian features are noticeable again in a third fragment from Tamluk<sup>22</sup> showing the head and bust of a female figure. The technique of production of these terracottas appears to be the same as noted above, and it is possible that the terracotta artists of lower Bengal from their familiarity with foreigners from different countries tried to introduce new types, only a very small fraction of which has now come to light.

The terracotta objects of the Gupta classical phase, found so far from Bengal, are relatively few in comparison with the abundant finds of the earlier phases. It is not possible to ascertain at present whether this comparative scarcity is due to a dwindling of artistic activity in terracotta or to a lack of proper exploration of the older sites which might have yielded a larger number of specimens than hitherto found. Tamluk as a centre of terracotta art seems to have declined during this phase, while Rāṅgāmāṭī (Murshidābād district, West Bengal), the site of Karnaśuvarṇa the capital seat of *Gauḍādhipa Śaśāṅka*, is found to have come into prominence. Besides, the other sites, already described, are also known to have brought to light stray and isolated specimens of terracotta art of this phase. There have been found a few fragmentary miniature pieces, apparently produced from moulds, bearing



all the refined traits of the Gupta plastic tradition. Being in terracotta, the style is, however, more human and less hieratic and the spiritual experience is less intense.<sup>23</sup> The emotional trend of the eastern version of the Gupta classical idiom is fully valid in the terracotta art of Bengal of this phase. Usually the plaques are furnished with perforations at the top, thereby indicating that they were intended for suspension on the walls as items of house decoration.

The gupta period introduces also large-size terracotta plaques as parts of the decorative scheme of brick temples. Mention should be made here of two such plaques, among others, found during the excavations at the site of Govinda Dhāp at Mahāsthān. One of them, a rectangular plaque, shows a representation of *makara*,<sup>24</sup> the mythical monster in Indian legend and art. A forceful delineation together with a precision in modelling characterises the piece. At the same time a highly ornate effect is produced by the arabesque-like treatment of the monster's snout and tail. The other is a medallion in the shape of lotus flower showing a human couple, apparently in conversation with each other.<sup>25</sup> The female bears a casket-like object in her left hand, while the right hand is gone. The male, standing to her left, has the left hand on his thigh, and right, missing from the forearm, was probably turned towards the female in an intimate gesture. Each of the figures wears earrings, a collar and bracelets. The female wears a *sārī* and the male a *dhoti*, each with folds indicated by incised lines and tied by girdles below the navel. The female has her hair disposed in curly rings, while that of the male is shown in wig-like curls along the shoulders. The lower part of each figure has not been shown. A soft and sensuous modelling characterises each figure, and the medallion seems to depict a homely and intimate scene, suggested as much by the attitudes of the two figures as by the caressing gesture of the male, which was very probably the intended pose of his right hand. The Gupta classical concept is present no doubt, but only in a distant manner.

FIG. 45

Stucco as a medium of artistic expression also comes to be fairly popular from the Gupta period. In Eastern India there were eminent productions in this medium. Reference has previously been made to the stucco figures on the circular brick



structure, called Maṇiyār Maṭha, at Rājagṛiha. At Nālandā stucco decoration was also characteristic of a number of late Gupta and post-Gupta monuments. Due to the susceptibility of the material to atmospheric action the majority of such figures and decorations have disintegrated after they had been exposed. In Bengal, too, the use of stucco also comes into view during this period, as may be testified to by the discovery of several fragments from different parts of Bengal. Mention may be made here of two stucco heads, one discovered from Tejandī (Rājshāhī district, North Bengal, East Pakistan), now in the author's collection, and the other from Rāṅgāmāṭī (Murshidābād district), now in the custody of the Archaeological Directorate of the Government of West Bengal. The former represents a rather corroded specimen, but in spite of the corrosion a soft and refined modelling characterises every lineament of the face. The drooping eyelids signify spiritual absorption. The full and fleshy cheeks and the thick lower lip betoken, at the same time, a sensuous and emotional content in the characteristic East Indian fashion. The stucco head from Rāṅgāmāṭī, perhaps because of its better preservation, appears to be a more felicitous production in which the above observations are found to be fully valid. The long and thick ear-stud, pierced through the left ear lobe, is interesting inasmuch as it reminds one of similiar studs worn by the rustic Bengali maidens till only very recently.

FIG. 47

The colossal brick temple at Pāhārpur is adorned with continuous bands of terracotta plaques<sup>26</sup> set in recessed panels, which run in a single row all around the basement and in double rows around the walls of the circumambulatory passages in the upper terraces. This scheme of decoration, logical and appropriate in a brick temple, was certainly contemporary to the date of the construction of the temple during the time of Dharmapāla, either towards the end of the eighth or the beginning of the ninth century A.D. Apparently then, these abundant remains of terracotta art fall outside the scope of our discussion from a chronological point of view. A brief reference, however, is felt to be necessary in order to complete our survey of Pāhārpur art. The most striking fact presented by the Pāhārpur terracottas is that they represent a local and indigenous trend, popular in inspiration and imagination, as well as in appeal. It will be evident



from what we have said above that the terracotta art of Bengal up till the Gupta period is generally affiliated to similar movements prevailing in the rest of Northern India in the different phases, and is, more or less, an expression in the medium of terracotta of the classical and hieratic trends. The terracotta art of Pāhārpur is entirely of a dissimilar and divergent character. Very intimately related to the third group of stone sculptures at Pāhārpur (chaps. IV and VII *ante*), it represents an art of the common people concerned chiefly with the depiction of their everyday life, their joys and sorrows, their amusements and occupations, their sports and pastimes and the like. Similarly, we have representations of the popular stories, stories from the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, tales from the *Pañchatantra* and the *Hitopadeśa*, and other common folk tales as well. Mythical animals, composites and grotesques always prevail upon popular fancies and such subjects have also been depicted, not unoften, among the Pāhārpur terracottas. Representations of divine and semi-divine beings, of *apsaras* and *gandharvas* are also not uncommon. In the representations it is the comic and humorous side of life that is often selected for delineation. Figures of emaciated ascetics in various attitudes and actions are often treated as exciting caricatures. Exuberant and varied, as the themes are, it is not possible even to enumerate them all. Approximately three thousand such terracotta plaques adorned the monument in its original state. Of these a fraction can now be found *in situ*, and of these again not an insignificant number is found to have been tampered with and disturbed in the subsequent ages, and perhaps more than once. A greater part of the monument having been damaged a large proportion of these terracotta plaques has been recovered loose and detached and there is no means available now to ascertain their original positions. It is not possible, hence, to determine any sequence of the subjects or themes depicted. We cannot say either whether any such sequence was intended in the original scheme. We are, nevertheless, bewildered by the exuberant richness and variety of the themes represented. Fully alive to their environment and the atmosphere of their everyday life the rustic artists seem to have portrayed everything that caught their imagination and fancy with a felicity that is hardly to be expected in a hieratic

FIGS. 52,  
53, 62  
FIG. 59

FIGS.  
48-51

FIGS.  
54-58,  
60-61



and sophisticated art tradition. Naive and simple in plastic diction, this art is forceful and dynamic in delineation of action and movement and masterful in expression. This character and spirit appear also to characterise the representations of the divine beings in terracotta. These terracotta plaques furnish us with a comprehensive picture of rural life in its different facets. These terracotta plaques, together with the third group of Pāhārpur sculptures, represent a vigorous autochthonous trend in Bengal and ideologically as well as aesthetically this trend is certainly of great import and significance in the history of Bengal sculpture.

## REFERENCES

1. Stella Kramrisch, Indian Terracottas (*Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, Vol. VII, 1939, p. 105).
2. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
3. Indian potters of the present day still make clay images in this process. The body is modelled by the hand, the ornaments are impressed from separate moulds and then applied and the head, again pressed from a mould, is then affixed to the shoulders by means of a tenon. They have moulds of varying sizes according to the proportions of the images.
4. *A.S.R.* 1917-18, p. 27, pl. XVI; A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Archaic Indian Terracottas (IPEK., 1928, fig. 51).*
5. *A.S.R.*, 1926-27, pl. XXXI. k.
6. S. K. Saraswati, *Survey of Indian Sculpture*, pp. 107-08. Several detached heads, principally of female figures and rarely of males, with elaborate coiffures adorned with medallions attached with fillets, or with bicornate head-dress, recovered from such sites at Tamluk, Berāchāmpā, Harinārāyanpur, etc., in lower Bengal and one from Birol in North Bengal, seem to have been originally affixed to separately modelled bodies. On the assumption that the technique was characteristic of Maurya terracotta art it has been suggested by some scholars that such heads should be ascribed to the Maurya age. Because of the persistence of this technique also in the subsequent epoch it is difficult to assign them definitely to the Maurya period merely on grounds of technique, unless other convincing data are available. In form and facial physiognomy, in the treatment of the coiffure and the head-dress these terracotta heads differ but little from those in the figures on the terracotta plaques, characteristic of the Śuṅga-Kāṇva epoch and should be more appropriately classed with them.
7. Stella Kramrisch, *Art of India through the ages*, pl. 7; S. K. Saraswati, *loc. cit.*, p. 108.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 109; Stella Kramrisch, *Indian Sculpture*, p. 205.
9. The terracotta plaque was recovered from a mound at Tamluk, along with



several copper cast coins, as a result of the erosion of the river Rupnārāyaṇ which cut away a part of this ancient seaport city. It was exhibited in a monthly meeting of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, now the Asiatic Society, Calcutta, in the year 1888 and was apparently presented to the Society, along with a few copper coins, discovered on the same occasion and under similar circumstances. An illustration of the figure was published in the *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* for 1888, pl. III (pp. 113-14). The remarkable plaque was, however, eventually lost and remained forgotten until late Professor E. H. Johnston of Oxford communicated the notice of a terracotta figurine, now in the Indian Institute, Oxford, in the *Annual Bibliography of Indian Archaeology for the year 1937* (Kern Institute, Leiden), Vol. XII, p. 16, pl. V, and later published a detailed article on it in the *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, Vol. X, 1942, pp. 94-102, pl. IX. A comparison of the illustration of the plaque, published in that *Journal*, with that in the *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* for the year 1888, cited above, leaves no doubt that the terracotta figurine, now in the Indian Institute, Oxford, is the same that was discovered at Tamluk and exhibited in the monthly meeting of the Asiatic Society in March, 1888. In size, in general likeness of the figure in each illustration in respect of its bearing, ornaments, apparel, coiffure treatment, etc., in the peculiar arched mark on the forehead and in the marks of the breaks in the plaque, the figures in the two illustrations are exactly identical, and the identity of the original of the two illustrations can no longer be questioned. The present writer discussed these points in a monthly meeting of the Asiatic Society in December, 1949 (*Year Book of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal* for 1949, pp. 174-75). He also wrote to the Indian Institute, Oxford, specifying the aforesaid points of identity, and requested them to communicate their views after a comparison of the original with the illustration in the *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* for 1888. The Curator of the Institute wrote back in reply that he had no doubt about the identity of the terracotta piece, now in their possession, with the one from Tamluk exhibited at the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1888. He further added that he could find no reference, among their records, to the time or mode of its acquisition by the Institute; but he thought it likely that it was acquired by the Institute shortly after 1888, when late Professor Monier Williams was actively engaged in collecting materials for the Museum from various parts of India. Professor Johnston and, following him, other scholars, have assumed that the plaque probably came from Kauśāmbī which was a prolific source of early Indian terracottas. It is now definitely known to have originally belonged to Bengal, and all scholars agree that it represents one of the most valuable records of Indian terracotta art.

10. E. H. Johnston, A Terracotta Figure at Oxford (*J.I.S.O.A.*, Vol. X, 1942, pp. 94-102, pl. IX).
11. Along the back the hair appears to hang down in a heavy mass reaching almost to the level of the knees. Though clearly visible in the lower part of the background, it seems to have escaped the notice of Professor Johnston



who probably mistook the mass of hair for the fluttering scarves. The fluttering ends of the scarves are clear and distinct and cannot possibly be confused with the heavy mass of hair.

12. P. C. Das Gupta, *Early Terracottas from Tamralipta*, pp. 23-24.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
14. A. K. Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, pp. 21, 230; fig. 16; also *Archaic Indian Terracottas (IPEK., 1928, p. 71, fig. 25)*.
15. *A.S.R.*, 1922-23, pl. X. b.
16. V. A. Smith, *Jaina Stupa and other antiquities of Mathura*, pl. XVIII.
17. *A.S.R.*, 1928-29, p. 96, pl. XLII. b.
18. K. G. Goswami, *Excavations at Bangarh*, pp. 18-19, pl. XX. 2(b), 4(a).
19. S. K. Saraswati, *Early Terracotta Art of Bengal (Hindusthan Standard, Puja Annual, 1951, p. 32)*.
20. P. C. Das Gupta, *loc. cit.*, p. 27.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
23. A small terracotta plaque (about 7 inches in height) from Pānnā (Midnapur district, West Bengal), showing Buddha seated in *dharmachakrapravartanamudrā*, exhibits the Gupta classical concept of the hieratic order in a rather insipient manner. It is now preserved in the Asutosh Museum of Indian Art, Calcutta University. Here we find the Master fully draped with the folds of the drapery indicated by shallow curved lines. The head is surrounded by a halo and within the halo representations of foliage, indicating apparently the foliage of the Bodhi tree. The Bodhi tree is usually associated with the images of Buddha in *bhūmisparśa-mudrā* signifying his enlightenment. The presence of foliage in a representation of the incident of the preaching of the first sermon seems to be inexplicable. The plaque bears several characters in Gupta Brāhmī script of the fourth-fifth century A.D. *Indian Archaeology: A Review, 1957-58, pl. LXXXVII. b.*
24. *A.S.R.*, 1934-35, pl. XVIII; 1935-36, pl. XXVII; 1936-37, pls. XV, a,b,d, XVI.
25. *Ibid.*, S. K. Saraswati, *Survey of Indian Sculpture*, pp. 172-73; fig. 132.
26. *Paharpur*, chap. V.; R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *History of Bengal, Vol. I*, pp. 526-30.

FIG. 46



## CHAPTER NINE

### CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The foregoing account will clearly demonstrate plastic activities in Bengal in the early, i.e. the pre-Pāla phase. From what we know of the early specimens it is apparent that up to the sixth century A. D. Bengal was following the traditions of the great art centres of Northern India, namely, Mathurā school in the Kushāṇa period and the Gupta school of Sārnāth in its eastern version in the Gupta. The eastern version of the Gupta trend is now known to have extended as far east as Assam. These great art schools denoted a common Indian character, at least so far as the hieratic art of the country was concerned, and the different regions came to be influenced by them. No regional idiom could hope to assert its individuality so long as they remained potent and vital. It is with the decline and exhaustion of the classical Gupta school in the seventh century A. D. that the regional idioms began to prevail and gave rise to the different regional or provincial schools of art which, it should be emphasised, developed on the foundations of the classical heritage. From what we have described as the indigenous art of about the eighth century A. D. at Pāhārpur it appears possible and very likely that a popular Bengali idiom, naive and crude, yet vigorous and full of forceful action and masterful expression, was existent in the earlier period too. The subsequent history of this indigenous Bengali idiom, it is regrettable to note however, has not been known till many centuries later, nor has the earlier history of this trend been clear because of the paucity of earlier examples. There is no doubt, however, that this indigenous art, coming into contact with the Gupta art in its eastern version, gave rise to the Pāla school of art. The second group of Pāhārpur sculptures and a few other specimens from different parts of Bengal betoken a stage in the transition from the Gupta to the Pāla art. The indigenous Bengali idiom, it has been already noted, was of deeper aesthetic significance, and it should be



our endeavour to trace its history in its earlier and later manifestations.

Specimens of early sculpture, particularly up to the sixth century A. D., found in Bengal are relatively few and the question arises whether they were produced within her boundaries by her people or were imported from reputed art centres abroad. The second alternative derives some support from the finds of sculptures in red sandstone, the distinctive medium of the Mathurā school, distributed over a wide area. Scholars are usually of opinion that these sculptures had been brought to the respective places from Mathurā, which had been a great art centre—Cunningham calls it a 'great manufactory'—in the first few centuries of the Christian era. It might thus appear that the practice of bringing finished images from great centres of art was not uncommon, and a suggestion may be tentatively made that the comparatively scanty remains of early sculptural art in Bengal had been imported from abroad.

The Śilpa texts lay down elaborate prescriptions for the making of an image of a divinity and its proper installation in a temple. In many such texts<sup>1</sup> we find detailed directions for the selection of stone which has to be brought to the site of the temple in which the image is to be consecrated and installed. On this site a special hut has to be erected, again, for the manufacture of the image. Moreover, the actual manufacture of the image to be consecrated has to pass through various rituals from start to finish. In view of such śāstric injunctions, the custom of importing images from abroad, even if known, does not appear to have been looked upon with much favour, and apparently was not generally resorted to. Rather, the common practice seems to have been the importation of a suitable kind of stone for the manufacture of the image locally at the site. The wide distribution of sculptures in the red sandstone of Mathurā need not necessarily suggest that finished images were brought from Mathurā to the respective places. It is more likely that the red sandstone, which was a convenient and favourite medium particularly with the Mathurā artists, was widely supplied to various distant places. In the Gupta classical phase, especially in the Sārnāth school, the favourite medium was the grey sandstone of Chunār. Images in that material have also been found



distributed over a large area and it should not, therefore, mean that every sculpture in that medium originated from Sārnāth, whence it had been brought to the particular place where it had been found. The common practice appears to have been to bring the material, and not the finished product. Up till the sixth century A. D. India retains her oneness in artistic pursuits and it is obvious that local ateliers, versed and proficient in the predominant style of the period, should exist throughout the country. Occasionally however, the services of reputed artists from outside, especially from the famous art centres, might have been requisitioned. The instances of 'Śivamitra, a sculptor of Mathurā',<sup>2</sup> who carved the seated figure of Bodhisattva found at Śrāvastī, and of 'Dinna of Mathurā',<sup>3</sup> the sculptor of the famous *parinirvāṇa* statue of the fifth century at Kāśī, should better be interpreted to mean that the artists themselves were brought from Mathurā to the respective sites, rather than the finished images.

It is in the light of the above observations that we have to discuss the question whether the few early sculptures, so far found in Bengal, had been brought from outside. There is an inherent possibility of their having been produced in Bengal unless the contrary is proved by definite and irrevocable data. Remains of terracotta art, numerous as they are, indicate plastic activities in this region from the Śuṅga period onwards, if not from still earlier epochs. It is reasonable and likely, therefore, to presume that there were also similar practices in the medium of stone, the remains being comparatively few due to the scarcity of the material in the riverine plains of Bengal. It is also of interest to note that of the Bengal sculptures of Kushāṇa date or with probable affinities with the Kushāṇa idiom indicating a date in the Kushāṇa phase, only one is in the mottled red sandstone of Mathurā. The red stone of the image of Kārtikeya from Mahāsthān differs from the mottled variety of red sandstone, the distinctive medium of the Mathurā artists. The sculptures with probable Kushāṇa affinities were executed in materials unknown to Mathurā artists. In view of the above, the hypothesis of the Mathurā origin and workmanship of these sculptures is difficult to be entertained. With regard to the few Gupta sculptures, only one is in Chunār sandstone, the distinctive medium of the Sārnāth artists, while the others are executed in a kind



of bluish basalt. Moreover, these sculptures represent an Eastern Indian version of the classical Gupta style of Sārnāth, and sculptures belonging to this version have been found over a wide area, from Bihar in the west to Assam in the east. Bengal was within the orbit of this eastern version of the Gupta trend. Remains of terracotta art, belonging to this period, are not only considerable but also varied in character. Stucco had also come into abundant use as a medium of plastic expression, as is evident from the fragmentary remains from Rāṅgāmāṭī and other places. Of course, stone and bronze sculptures, hitherto discovered, are rather few. The comparative scantiness of the former might have been due partly to the scarcity of stone in Bengal and partly to lack of proper scientific exploration in this part of the country. Bronze and metal sculptures of this period are also very few, even on an all-India background, and the scarcity of sculptures of this class in Bengal has to be viewed in that light. We should note, as we have done in the Introduction, that other evidences, such as the evidences supplied by inscriptions, etc., bear eloquent testimony to conditions favourable for the development of art in Bengal. The history of this region was not isolated from that of the rest of India. The greater portion of this territory formed an integral part of the Gupta empire, and there is no reason why local genius should not cultivate art and become imbued with the ideas and ideologies of the Gupta classical trend. The Gupta sculptures in various mediums, found in Bengal, presumably appear to be the works of local artists fairly conversant with the predominant style and tradition of this period, in one of their distinctive regional expressions.

A few observations may be made here with regard to the general character of the Pāhārpur sculptures. The Pāhārpur sculptures in all the three groups cannot be said to have any cult significance, but appear merely as decorative embellishments of the basement wall of the temple, just as the terracotta dados are of the different terrace walls. We have already discussed what the original scheme of decoration was in this respect. The majority of the sculptures are narrative in character, and the themes, whether from the myth of Kṛishṇa or from the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, have been given plastic expression in their main incidents only, the minor details having been



omitted. With regard to the individual images it should be noted at the outset that the complex and complicated iconographic types, characteristic of the later period, are not represented at Pāhārpur. Iconographic types, too, do not seem to have been stereotyped and standardised, as in the following period. Images do not strictly conform to the descriptions of the usually known texts, perhaps because the sculptures being more or less decorative elements, the artists did not lay much emphasis on this aspect. Dikshit<sup>4</sup> may also be right in saying that "it is not impossible that the *sādhana*s or directions, according to which the images at Paharpur were made, were different from those in use in later times." That the Pāhārpur artists did use a different set of texts is evident from the fact that some of the most distinctive cognisances of certain particular divinities, invariably found in later images, are conspicuous by their absence at Pāhārpur. In striking contrast, there appear several distinctive features, conspicuously absent in the sculptures of the later period as also in the Purāṇas and the Tantras which constitute the principal textual basis of these later sculptures. Surprisingly enough, these distinctive peculiarities find striking confirmation in the *Bṛihat Saṃhitā* and the *Viṣṇudharmottaram*, but sometimes these two, by themselves, fail to equate properly an image in every detail. Images, though not many, represent variety. Iconographic types, characteristic of the later phases, are generally absent. The images of Viṣṇu and Sūrya, so profusely abundant in the art of the subsequent period, are entirely lacking. Though Śiva appears, he appears in his severely ascetic form, and no image of Umā-Maheśvara, so favourite a motif in the succeeding period, is known. An inscription of the Gupta period<sup>5</sup> refers to the popularity of the cult of the goddess Śakti, but no image, affiliated to this cult, has been found at Pāhārpur. Instead of Viṣṇu, we have the Kṛṣṇaite scenes. Yamunā and Balarāma appear, possibly, in that connection. Several images of *dikpālas* appear in their appropriate positions, and among the rare and unique specimens, we may mention those that we have identified as Bṛihaspati, Chandra and future Manu.

We have already observed that a popular Bengali idiom in art, of which we have a late evidence in a group of Pāhārpur sculptures, was evidently existent in the earlier period too. But



it could not assert itself against the impact of the classical Gupta idiom in its eastern version. On the decline of the Gupta political power the Bengalis began to assert themselves more and more in the political sphere, and about the second half of the sixth century A. D. we find a line of independent rulers in Bengal assuming imperial titles. About this time the Bengalis appear to have emerged as an important political power in Northern India and their attempts to extend their influence beyond their natural frontiers brought them into conflict with the other contemporary powers. In the seventh century *Gauḍādhīpa* Śaśāṅka was able to maintain for sometime a supreme position in Northern India and after this, through various conflicts the Bengalis came to the forefront of North Indian politics with the election of the Pālas to the sovereignty of Bengal in the eighth century A. D. Simultaneously with this political advancement such an assertion of local genius is apparent in the cultural sphere too, and we find that about the seventh century, as is obvious in the second group of Pāhārpur sculptures and a few other stray examples, the popular indigenous idiom in art which appear to have but little scope against the classical Gupta trend in its eastern version in the fifth century and even in the sixth, has already transformed the latter in such a manner as to make way for the subsequent Pāla art that had a remarkable history in the mediaeval art of India. Throughout India the disintegration of the Gupta empire ushered in a period of a conscious regional outlook which came to occupy a prominent place in the life and culture of the people. Similar forces were also at work in Bengal. The seventh and the eighth centuries A. D. may be looked upon, politically as well as culturally, as the critical moment when the Bengali genius began to exert more and more until it evolved, along with a political empire, a regional school of art of certain import and significance.

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3. *Ibid.*, pp. 74, 84.
4. *A.S.R.*, 1926-27, p. 146.
5. D. C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions*, pp. 379-85.



## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

<i>Plate</i>	<i>Figure</i>	<i>Description</i>
I	1.	Chandraketugarh : Head and bust of Buddha. (Asutosh Museum of Indian Art, Calcutta University).
	2.	Dinājpur : Colossal Head. (Rājshāhī Museum).
	3.	Mahāsthān : Torso of a male figure holding a staff—Kārtikeya ? (Asutosh Museum of Indian Art, Calcutta University).
	4.	Hānkraīl : Vishṇu. (Rājshāhī Museum).
II	5.	Bihārail : Buddha. (Rājshāhī Museum).
	6.	Manir Tat : Śiva. Bronze. (Private Collection, Calcutta).
	7.	Mahāsthān : Mañjuśrī. Gold-plated Bronze. (Rājshāhī Museum).
	8.	Kāśīpur : Sūrya. (Asutosh Museum of Indian Art, Calcutta University).
	9.	Deorā : Sūrya. (Rājshāhī Museum).
III	10.	Pāhārpur : Rādhā-Kṛishṇa ?
	11.	Pāhārpur : Balarāma.
IV	12.	Pāhārpur : Śiva.
	13.	Pāhārpur : Yamunā.
V	14.	Pāhārpur : Śivaite Panel.
	15.	Pāhārpur : Panel depicting fight with Chānūra and Muṣṭhika.
VI	16.	Pāhārpur : Panel depicting the killing of Keśī.
	17.	Pāhārpur : Panel depicting the breaking of twin Arjuna trees.
VII	18.	Pāhārpur : Agni.
	19.	Pāhārpur : Yama.
VIII	20.	Pāhārpur : Kubera.
	21.	Pāhārpur : Trīśirā.
	22.	Pāhārpur : Indra.
IX	23.	Pāhārpur : Bṛihaspati.
	24.	Pāhārpur : Chandra.
X	25.	Pāhārpur : Śiva.
	26.	Pāhārpur : Bhaviṣhya Manu.



<i>Plate</i>	<i>Figure</i>	<i>Description</i>
XI	27.	Pāhārpur : Śiva ?
	28.	Pāhārpur : Kṛishṇa as butter-thief.
XII	29.	Pāhārpur : Vasudeva carrying Kṛishṇa.
	30.	Pāhārpur : Killing of Pralamba.
XIII	31.	Pāhārpur : Dancer.
	32.	Pāhārpur : Dvāra-pāla.
	33.	Pāhārpur : Fight between monkey and rākshasa.
	34.	Pāhārpur : Dvāra-pāla.
XIV	35.	Pāhārpur : Amatory couple.
	36.	Pāhārpur : Nativity of Buddha ?
XV	37.	Tamluk : Yakshiṇī. Terracotta. (Private Collection, Calcutta).
XVI	38.	Tamluk : Yakshiṇī. Terracotta. (Indian Institute, Oxford).
XVII	39.	Berāchāmpā : Fragmentary plaque showing head of a Yakshiṇī. Terracotta. (Asutosh Museum of Indian Art, Calcutta University).
	40.	Tamluk : Mould showing the representation of a winged god. Terracotta. (Asutosh Museum of Indian Art, Calcutta University).
	41.	Berāchāmpā : Head and bust of female figure. Terracotta. (Asutosh Museum of Indian Art, Calcutta University).
XVIII	42.	Berāchāmpā : Fragmentary plaque showing an elaborately coiffured head. Terracotta. (Asutosh Museum of Indian Art, Calcutta University).
	43.	Berāchāmpā : Fragmentary plaque showing the lower part of a Yakshiṇī standing over the head of an elephant. Terracotta. (Asutosh Museum of Indian Art, Calcutta University).
	44.	Berāchāmpā : Male figure, perhaps a Yaksha. Terracotta. (Asutosh Museum of Indian Art, Calcutta University).
XIX	45.	Mahāsthān : Medallion showing, perhaps, an intimate domestic scene. Terracotta. (Indian Museum, Calcutta).
	46.	Pānnā : Plaque showing Buddha in <i>dharmachakrapravartana-mudrā</i> . Terracotta. (Asutosh Museum of Indian Art, Calcutta University).
	47.	Rāṅgāmāṭī : Head of a goddess. Stucco. (Directorate of Archaeology, West Bengal).
XX	48.	Pāhārpur : Plaque with the representation of a folk tale. Terracotta.



<i>Plate</i>	<i>Figure</i>	<i>Description</i>
	49.	Pāhārpur : Plaque with the representation of the story of the meddlesome monkey. Terracotta.
	50.	Pāhārpur : Plaque with the representation of the story of a lion rescued by a mouse. Terracotta.
	51.	Pāhārpur : Plaque with the representation of the story of the quarrelsome lion. Terracotta.
XXI	52.	Pāhārpur : Plaque with the representation of a flute-player. Terracotta.
	53.	Pāhārpur : Plaque with the representation of an amatory couple. Terracotta.
	54.	Pāhārpur : Plaque with the representation of a pot-bellied male figure. Terracotta.
	55.	Pāhārpur : Plaque with the representation of a Nāginī. Terracotta.
XXII	56.	Pāhārpur : Plaque with the representation of a god with lotus flower, perhaps Padmapāṇi. Terracotta.
	57.	Pāhārpur : Plaque with the representation of a three-headed god. Terracotta.
	58.	Pāhārpur : Plaque with the representation of a ten-handed goddess. Terracotta.
	59.	Pāhārpur : Plaque with the representation of a Śavari huntress. Terracotta.
XXIII	60.	Pāhārpur : Plaque with the representation of an archer, perhaps Rāma. Terracotta.
	61.	Pāhārpur : Plaque with the representation of a goddess, perhaps Tārā. Terracotta.
XXIV	62.	Pāhārpur : Plaque with the representation of a Śavara couple. Terracotta.



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## INDEX

- Abhaya(mudrā)*, 12, 21, 51  
*Abhidhāna-Chintāmaṇi*, 79  
*Abhidhāna Ratnamālā*, 78  
*Abhijñāna-Śakuntalam*, 103  
*Abhilashitārtha-Chintāmaṇi* (or *Māna-sollāsa*), 29, 36  
*Ādiparva* (of *Mahābhārata*), 64  
 'Ageless' type of terracotta art, 93-95  
 Aghora, 59  
 Agni, 37, 71  
*Agni-purāṇa*, 54, 55, 56, 63, 64, 75, 78, 79, 80, 90  
 Agra, 11  
 Airāvata, 70, 79  
 Akhun Dheri, winged Goddess from, 102  
*Aksha-mālā*, 58, 59, 64, 73, 78, 80  
*Aksha-sūtra*, 71, 79, 80  
 Amorous couple from Pāhārpur, 42  
 Ānandavardhana, 52  
 Ananta (Nāga), 55  
 Aṅgada, 84  
*Āṅkuśa*, 99  
 Annapūrṇā, 62  
*Apsaras*, 85, 101, 109  
*Archchā*, 6, 36  
*Ardha-chandra*, 58, 74  
 Arishta, 67  
 Arjuna (epic hero), 84  
 Arjuna tree, 65, 69  
 Aruṇa, 24, 25, 26  
 Āshrafpur, inscription from, 31  
*Ashṭa-dhātu*, 27  
*Ashtasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, 70  
 Aśoka, 5, 10  
*Asuras*, 61, 83, 85  
 Aśvaghosha, 102  
*Ātma-jñāna*, 19  
 Avalokiteśvara, 5, 89  
 Ayodhyā, 86  
 Bachhofer, Ludwig, 13  
 Bādāmi, 67  
 Baigrām, inscription from, 4  
 Balabhadra, 55, 63  
 Baladeva, 63, 64  
 Balāi Dhāp (Mahāsthān), 26  
 Balarāma, 37, 39, 41, 51, 53, 55-58, 63-68, 82-84, 86, 117  
 Bālī, 84  
 Banerji, R.D., 16, 36, 38, 64, 73, 74, 76, 77  
 Bāngarh, terracottas from, 95, 103  
 Barākar, temple of, 60  
 Basārḥ, terracotta plaques from, 102  
 Beal, S., 8  
 Berāchāmpā, terracottas from, 95, 102, 110  
 Besnagar, Gaṅgā image from, 54  
 Bhadrāsena, 83  
*Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, 52, 79, 83, 90  
 Bhairava, 59  
 Bhaṇḍiraka tree, 83  
 Bhaṇḍira-vana, 83  
*Bhaṅga* (bend), 76  
 Bha-ra-ha, 5  
 Bharata, 86  
 Bhārhut, 10  
 Bhattasali, N.K., 27-28, 31, 32, 36  
 Bhikhurāj, 28, 29  
 Bhṛīṅgī, 59  
 Bhumārā, temple of, 60  
*Bhūmiśpārśa-mudrā* 112  
 Bhutesar pillars, 104  
 Bhuvaneśvara, 10, 60  
 Bihārail, image of Buddha from, 23, 24, 30  
 Birol, terracottas from, 103, 105, 110  
 Bitpāla, 28  
 Bodhgayā, 10, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, 99  
 Bodhisattva, 17-19, 21, 34, 115  
 Bodhi tree, 112  
 Brahmā, 2, 61, 62, 73, 74, 76  
*Brahma-purāṇa*, 52, 66  
*Brahmaivaivarta-purāṇa*, 52, 66  
 Bṛihaspati, 37, 74, 80, 117  
*Bṛihat Saṃhitā*, 2, 8, 53, 56-59  
 Brown, G. Baldwin, 1, 2, 8  
 Buddha, 5, 17-24, 27, 72, 89, 112  
 Buddha-Bodhisattva, 11-13, 15, 17  
 Bulandi Bāgh, 96, 97  
 Chaitanya, 52  
 Chaitya-window, 24  
 Chakra, 55, 64  
 Chālukyās (Western), 29  
 Chāmara, 73  
 Chanda, R.P., 18, 19, 21, 31, 34  
 Chandimau, reliefs on pillars from, 22  
 Chandra, 37, 74, 75, 117



- Chandraketurgarh, 11, 12, 15  
 Chandra-śekhara, 62, 74  
 Chandravarman, 4, 31  
 Chānūra, 41, 65, 68, 79  
 Chashtana, 13  
 Chatterji, S.K., 49  
 Chaudhagrām, images from, 30, 31, 33, 48  
 Chitrakūṭa, 72  
 Chunār, 114, 115  
 Coomaraswamy, A.K., 6, 8, 16, 34, 110, 112, 118  
 Cunningham, A., 34, 114
- Dah Parvatiyā, River goddesses from, 22, 54, 55  
 Dāma (string), 69  
 Dāmodarpur, inscriptions from, 4  
 Dānavas, 61, 83  
 Daṇḍa (club), 71, 72  
 Daṇḍī, 12, 25, 26, 32  
 Daśavatāra temple (of Deogarh), 26, 75  
 Dasgupta, P.C., 112  
 Della Seta, Alessandro, 3  
 Deogarh temple, 60, 75  
 Deorā, Sūrya image from, 24-26, 30, 41  
 Deva, 6, 61  
 Devakhadga, 29, 31  
 Devakī, 55, 81, 88  
 Devakula, 5  
 Devapāla, 57  
 Devī, 59, 62, 85  
 Devī-Bhāgavata, 85  
 Dhānāidaha, inscription from, 4  
 Dhanapati, 63  
 Dharmachakrapravartana-mudrā, 112  
 Dharmāditya, 4  
 Dharmapāla, 14, 38, 39, 45, 49, 108  
 Dhātā, 26  
 Dhenuka, 66, 67, 83  
 Dhenukāsura-vadha, 66, 67  
 Dhīmān, 28  
 Dhoti, 27, 57, 70, 73, 76, 77, 87, 107  
 Dhūmornā, 72  
 Dhvaja, 99  
 Dhvanyāloka of Ānandavardhana, 52, 63  
 Dhyāna, 12, 19, 25, 32, 55, 56, 74, 77  
 Dhyāna-yoga, 19, 23  
 Dhyāna-yogin, 19  
 Dhyānī Buddha Akshobhya, 27  
 Didarganj, Yakshi from, 105
- Dikpālas, 37, 69, 71, 117  
 Dikshit, K.N., 37, 38, 42-44, 49, 51, 53, 59-63, 65-67, 70, 73, 74, 76, 77, 84-88, 90  
 Dinna, 115  
 Divākara, 26  
 Durgā, 30, 61, 62  
 Duryodhana, 52  
 Dushyanta, 103  
 Dvāra-pālas, 6, 37, 87, 88
- Earth goddess, 60, 62  
 Ekānāṣā, 53, 63
- Fabri, C.L., 60, 61  
 Fa-hien, 5, 8  
 Faridpur, copperplates from, 4  
 Foucher, Alfred, 8
- Gadā, 55, 64  
 Gaṇa(s), 24  
 Gaṇapati, 77  
 Gandhāra, 14, 19  
 Gandharvas, 109  
 Gandharva princes, 69  
 Gaṇeśa, 37, 42, 77, 78  
 Gaṅgā, image from Besnagar, 54  
 Ganges, 102  
 Gangoly, O.C., 38  
 Garga, 89  
 Garuḍa, 31, 84  
 Gāthā Saptasatī of Hāla, 52  
 Gautama Buddha, 5  
 Gayā, 29, 57  
 Ghārwa, temple of, 60  
 Ghosūṇḍi, inscription from, 63  
 Gītagrām, terracottas from, 95, 103  
 Gokula, 81, 82  
 Gopachandra, 4  
 Gopī(s), 52, 53, 82  
 Goswami, K.G., 112  
 Govardhana, 66, 82  
 Govinda, 90  
 Govinda Dhāp (Mahāsthān), 107  
 Grahas, 74  
 Great Vehicle, 5  
 Greece, 106  
 Gunaighar, inscription from, 4  
 Gupta, 4, 5, 7, 15, 17-20, 22, 26, 27, 30, 31, 33, 34, 37, 38, 40, 46-49, 53, 54, 60, 69, 75, 106-109, 112-118  
 Gupta terracottas 107-108, 112



- Hala*, 55, 56  
*Hāla*, 52  
*Haladhara*, 55  
*Halapāṇi*, 55  
*Halāyudha*, 55, 78  
*Hānkrail*, Viṣṇu image from, 12, 13  
*Hanumat*, 84  
*Hara*, 32, 75  
*Hari*, 63  
*Harinārāyaṇpur*, terracottas from, 95, 101, 110  
*Harivaṃśa*, 52, 59, 66, 67, 79, 83, 90  
*Harshavardhana*, 33  
*Hayasīrsha Pañcharātra*, 32, 36, 54, 55, 58, 61, 64, 75, 79, 80, 118  
*Hemachandra*, 79  
*Hemādri*, 80  
*Hitopadeśa*, 109  
*Hiuen Tsang*, 4, 5, 6  
  
*Indra*, 37, 41, 62, 69, 70, 82, 85, 90  
*Indrajit*, 84  
*Indukalā*, 58, 74  
*Indus civilisations*, 10, 93  
*Īśāna*, 59  
*Isipatana*, 18  
*I-tsing*, 5, 9, 31  
  
*Jaṭā*, 32, 58, 75, 76, 77, 80  
*Jātaka*, 103  
*Jaṭā-mukuta*, 27, 32, 74, 75, 88, 89  
*Jaṭāyu*, 86  
*Jayadeva*, 53  
*Jayanāga*, 4  
*Johnston, E.H.*, 99, 100-102, 111  
  
*Kākadīghi*, Viṣṇu image from, 33, 48  
*Kākapaksha*, 65, 68, 78, 79, 86  
*Kālākūṭa*, 61  
*Kālidāsa*, 40, 64, 103  
*Kāma*, 88  
*Kamaṇḍalu*, 58, 59, 64, 71, 79, 80  
*Kaṃsa*, 55, 65, 67, 68, 81, 86, 88, 90  
*Kanishka*, 13  
*Kaṇva*, 103  
*Kāṇva(s)*, 10, 97, 104, 110  
*Karṇasuvārṇa*, 5, 106  
*Kārtikeya*, 11, 61, 115  
*Kāsia*, 115  
*Kāśipur*, Sūrya image from, 24, 25, 30, 41  
*Kaṭi-hastā*, 53  
  
*Kauśāmbi*, 12, 100, 103, 111  
*Keśava*, 63  
*Keśin*, 67, 68  
*Keśi-nidhana*, 67  
*Kevala-jñāna*, 19  
*Khadga dynasty* (of East Bengal), 5, 29, 31  
*Khaṇḍagiri* (Orissa), 10  
*Kie-lo-na-su-fa-la-na*, 5  
*Kinnaras*, 89  
*Kirīṭa*, 24, 25, 31  
*Kirīṭa-mukuta*, 13  
*Kirtimukha*, 69  
*Kosām*, 99  
*Koṭivarsha*, 4  
*Kramrisch*, Stella, 13, 16, 17, 19, 20, 22, 31, 34, 38, 45, 46, 48, 50, 87, 90, 92, 94, 101, 110  
*Kripāṇa*, 55  
*Kṛishṇa*, 37, 39, 41, 46, 51-55, 63-69, 79, 81-84, 86-90, 116, 117  
*Kubera*, 37, 71, 73, 85  
*Kucha-paṭṭa*, 40, 61  
*Kumārpur*, Sūrya image from, 11, 12  
*Kuṇḍala*, 58, 64, 69  
*Kuṇḍikā*, 71, 80  
*Kūrma*, 53  
*Kurkihār*, 29, 57  
*Kushāṇa*, 7, 11-15, 17, 18, 20, 21, 25, 102, 104, 105, 113, 115  
*Kuvalayāpīḍa*, 68  
  
*Lakṣhaṇakāṭi*, Viṣṇu image from, 31  
*Lakshmaṇa*, 75, 84, 86  
*Lakshmī*, 29, 60  
*Lambodara*, 73  
*Lalitpur* (Patan), 36  
*Lāṅgala*, 55, 64  
*Lāṅgalin*, 55, 64  
*Laṅkā*, 85  
*Legge, J.*, 8  
*Lokas*, 61  
*Lo-to-mo-chih*, 5  
*Lumbini*, 89  
  
*Madhūchchhisṭa-vidhāna*, 28  
*Madhyadeśa*, 22, 46  
*Mahābhārata*, 37, 53, 60, 61, 64, 84, 101, 103, 109, 116  
*Mahābhāṣya* of Patañjali, 55, 60  
*Mahādeva*, 59, 64, 76  
*Mahāpuruṣa*, 18  
*Mahārāja Trikamala*, 18



Mahāsthān, 11, 12, 27, 29, 30, 41, 95,  
 103, 107, 115; inscription from, 3  
 Mahāśvetā, 25  
 Mahendra, 74, 90  
 Mahodara, 73  
 Maiya, 102  
 Majumdar, N.G., 27, 28, 29  
 Majumdar, R.C., 8, 112  
 Makara, 82, 100, 107  
 Mallasārul, inscription from, 4  
 Mānasāra, 2, 8  
 Mānasollāsa, 29  
 Mandor, *torana* pillar from, 67  
 Manir Tat, Śiva image from, 32, 33,  
 48, 80  
 Maṇiyār Maṭha, 22, 26, 41, 54, 108  
 Mañjuśrī, 26, 27, 29, 30, 41  
 Manu(s), 2, 37, 77, 80, 117  
 Marshall, Sir John, 16, 21, 34, 49  
 Mathurā, 11-15, 17-21, 34, 68, 102,  
 104, 105, 112, 113, 114, 115  
 Matsya-purāṇa, 9, 26, 61, 64, 71, 78-80  
 Maurya, 3, 4, 7, 10, 16, 92, 95, 96,  
 110  
 Maurya terracotta, 95-97  
 Maya, 2  
 Māyā, 102  
 Mayūra-chhatra, 59  
 Mayūra-paksha-dhvaja 59  
 Meghadūta, 64, 80  
 Midnapore, copperplate inscriptions  
 from, 4  
 Mithuna, 103  
 Morā, well inscription from, 63  
 Mother goddess, 94, 101, 102  
 Mrigasthāpana Stūpa, 5  
 Muhammadan Conquest (of Bengal),  
 1, 3  
 Mukhopādhyāya, H.K., 36  
 Mūlaka-kanda, 78  
 Musala, 55, 56, 64  
 Musalapāṇi, 55  
 Musalāyudha, 55  
 Musalin, 55, 63  
 Mushṭika, 41, 65, 68, 79  
  
 Nāga, 12, 58  
 Nāganikā, 63  
 Nāgini, 22, 54  
 Nālandā, 29, 57, 108  
 Nānāghāt, inscription at, 63  
 Nanda, 89  
 Nandi-vaktra, 59  
 Nārada, 69

Nativity of the Buddha, 89  
 Navatāla-pramāṇa, 36  
 Neo-Platonism, 3  
 Nepal, 28, 29, 36, 70  
 Newari Artists, 30, 36  
 Nidhis (treasures), 73, 80  
 Nilakaṇṭha, 60, 61, 62  
 Niyāmatpur, Sūrya image from,  
 11, 12  
 Nṛityaśāstra, 87  
  
 Osian, image of Balarāma from, 57  
 Ow-Wachendorf, 100, 101  
 Oxyrhynchus Papyrus, 102  
  
 Padma, 12, 55, 64, 73, 80  
 Padmapāṇi Avalokiteśvara, 80  
 Pāhārpur, 5, 7, 22, 30, 32, 33, 37-  
 49, 51, 53, 54, 56, 59, 65, 67, 70-  
 78, 80, 81, 83, 86, 89, 108, 109, 110,  
 113, 116-118  
 Pāhārpur, inscription from, 4, 5  
 Pāla, 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 25, 29, 31, 33,  
 34, 36-38, 46, 48, 49, 50, 69, 89,  
 113, 118.  
 Pañchachūdā, 101  
 Pañchatantra, 109  
 Pāṇini, 63  
 Pānnā, terracotta plaque from, 112  
 Paraśurāmeśvara temple, 60  
 Paridhāna, 13  
 Parinirvāṇa statue, 115  
 Parivāra-devatās, 6  
 Pārśva-devatās, 6  
 Paryāṅka-bandha, 17, 34  
 Pāśa, 71, 72  
 Pāśabhṛt, 72  
 Pāśin, 72  
 Pāṭaliputra, 96  
 Patañjali, 55, 56  
 Patna, 11, 29, 105  
 Piṅgala, 12, 25, 26, 32  
 Plotinus, 3  
 Pokharṇā, 30, 36, 97  
 Po-shi-po, 5  
 Prabhākara, 26  
 Prabhāvatī, 29, 31  
 Prāchyas, 22  
 Pralamba, 67, 83  
 Pralamba-vadha, 83  
 Prapañchasāra-tantra, 79  
 Pratimā, 6  
 Pratyushā, 25, 32, 34



- Pūjāśilā*, 63  
 Puṇḍra, 1  
 Puṇḍravardhana, 4, 5, 27  
 Puṇḍravardhana-*bhukti*, 30  
 Pun-na-fa-tan-na, 5  
 Pūrva-deśa, 22  
 Pūrva-kāraṇāgama, 79  
 Pūrva-megha (*Meghadūta*), 64, 80  
 Pushkaraṇā, 4, 30  
 Pustaka, 73, 80  
 Pūtanā, 67  
  
 Rādā, 37, 39, 40, 51-53, 63  
 Rājagriha, 22, 41, 108  
 Rājgir, 11,  
*Rākshasas*, 85  
 Rāma (Balarāma), 55, 63, 64, 79, 90  
 Rāma (epic hero), 75, 84, 86  
*Rāmāyaṇa*, 37, 83, 85, 86, 109, 116  
 Rāṅgāmāṭi, terracottas from, 103,  
 106, 108, 116; stucco fragment  
 from, 108, 116  
 Rao, T.A.G. Gopinath, 28, 35, 63  
 Rati, 88  
 Rauhiṇeya, 55  
 Rāvāṇa, 86  
 Ray, S. K., 36, 64, 79  
 Rohiṇī, 55, 79  
 Rukmiṇī, 53, 63  
*Rūpamaṇḍana*, 79  
 Rūpnārāyaṇ, 111  
  
*Sabhāparvan* (of *Mahābhārata*), 52  
 Sābhār, terracottas from, 103  
 Sadāśiva, 59  
*Sādhanas*, 117  
 Sadyojāta, 59  
 Saheth-Maheth, 11, 12  
 Śaka (era), 34  
 Śaka-Kushāṇa, 104  
 Śakra, 90  
 Śakti, 117  
*Sālyaparvan* (of *Mahābhārata*), 52  
 Samāchārādeva, 4  
*Samādhi*, 19  
*Samapada-sthānaka*, 17, 21, 32, 34, 46,  
 58, 89, 102  
 Samatāṭa, 1  
 Śambhu, 64, 79  
 Sambodhi, 19  
*Sanatkumāra Saṃhitā*, 64  
 Sāñchī, 10, 11, 40, 49, 86, 99  
 Saṅkarshana, 55, 56, 63, 90  
*Śaṅkha*, 55, 64, 72, 73, 80  
  
*Śārādātīlaka-tantra*, 32  
 Saraswati, S. K., 16, 34, 36, 110, 112  
*Sāri*, 107  
 Sārṇāth, 12, 18, 20-24, 26, 39, 33, 40,  
 41, 113-116  
 Sarvāṇī, 29, 31, 33, 34, 48  
 Śaśāṅka (*Gauḍādhipa*), 4, 106, 118  
 Satī, 62  
 Śatrughṇa, 86  
 Satyabhāmā, 53, 63  
*Saundarānandakāvya* of Aśvaghosha, 102  
 Śavarī, 75  
 Schiller, 1  
 Sen, S., 52, 63  
 Sena, 1, 46, 49, 50  
 Śesha, 55, 63  
*Śikhi-pichchha-dhvaja*, 59  
 Sikrī, 11  
*Śilparatna*, 79  
*Śilpaśāstras*, 2, 4, 27, 28  
 Śilpa texts, 2, 4, 28, 114  
 Siluā, stone sculpture from, 10  
 Simhavāhini (*Durgā*), 30  
 Sinnya, Shyāmlāl, 36  
*Sīra*, 55  
 Sirabhrit, 55  
 Sirapāṇī, 55  
 Sīrāyudha, 55  
 Sircar, D.C., 118  
 Sirin, 55  
 Śiśupāla, 52  
 Sītā, 86  
 Śiva, 8, 32, 37, 39, 41, 48, 58, 59, 60-  
 62, 70, 74, 74-78, 80, 117  
 Śivamitra, 115  
*Śiva-purāṇa*, 61, 64  
 Skanda Dhāp (*Mahāsthān*), 11  
 Smith, V.A., 112  
 Soma, 74  
 Somanātha, 74  
 Someśvara Bhūlokamalla, author of  
*Mānasollāsa*, 29  
 Śrāvastī, 117  
 Śrī, 29, 30  
 Śrīdāma, 83  
*Śrī-Mahābhāgavata*, 68, 79  
*Sthapati*, 2  
 Subhadrā, 84  
*Subhadrā-haraṇa*, 84  
 Sugrīva, 84  
 Suhma, 1  
 Śukrāchārya, 4  
*Śukranītisāra*, 8  
*Śūlaka*, 78  
 Sultānganj, Buddha image from, 22,  
 23, 27, 29



Sunda, 85  
 Śuṅga, 7, 94, 96, 99, 102, 115  
 Śuṅga-Kāṇva art, 10, 97, 103, 110  
*Sūprabhedāgama*, 79  
 Sūrya, 11, 12, 14, 15, 24, 25, 30, 32  
 33, 34, 41, 48, 117  
 Susuniā, 3  
 Susuniā rock inscription, 3-4, 40  
*Sūtragrahin*, 2

Takakusu, J., 9  
*Takshaka*, 2  
 Tamruk, terracottas from, 95-97, 98-  
 103, 106, 110  
 Tāmralipti, 4, 5, 95, 96, 101  
*Tantras*, 117  
 Tārā, 84  
 Tāranātha, 28  
 Tatpurusha, 59  
 Taxila, 13  
 Tejnanādi, stucco head from, 108  
 Terracottas, 7, 49, 91-112, 115, 116  
 Tibet, 28, 29  
*Tilaka*, 77  
*Toraṇa*, 10, 67  
*Tribhaṅga*, 87, 88  
*Trineta*, 76, 79, 80  
*Tri-ratha*, 73  
*Trisira*, 85, 86  
*Trisūla*, 32, 36, 58, 75, 99  
*Trivali*, 26, 27, 39, 58  
*Tvashṭri*, 2, 85

*Udara-bandha* (belly-band), 57, 70  
 Udayagiri (Orissa), 10  
 Umā-Maheśvara, 117  
 Umā-vaktra, 59  
 Upasunda, 85  
*Upavita*, 31  
*Ūrdhva-liṅga*, 32, 58, 59, 74-77, 80  
 Ushā, 25, 32, 34  
*Ushniṣha*, 17, 23  
*Utpala*, 77, 78  
 Utpala, Commentator of *Bṛiha*  
*Samhitā*, 79

*Vāhana(s)*, 76, 94  
*Vaikhānasāgama*, 56, 63  
 Vainyagupta, 4  
 Vaiśālī, 102  
*Vajra*, 71, 79, 85, 89  
 Vāmadeva, 59  
*Vanamālā*, 31

*Vanaparvan* (of *Mahābhārata*), 84  
 Vaṅga, 1  
 Vappaghoshavāta inscription, 4  
*Varada (mudrā)*, 27, 32, 51, 55, 57, 64,  
 73, 75, 80, 89  
 Varāhamihira, 2, 63, 64, 70, 79, 80,  
 117  
*Vardhaki*, 2  
 Varendra, 5  
 Varuṇa, 72  
 Vasu, 74  
 Vasudeva, 55, 81, 90  
 Vāsudeva, 63  
 Vāsudeva-Vishṇu, 55, 56  
 Vāsuki, 61  
 Vaṭagohālī, 5  
 Vedas, 85  
*Vibhavas*, 55, 56  
 Vidyādhara, 89  
 Vidyāsāgara, Jivānanda, 8  
*Vihāra*, 5  
 Vināyaka, 78  
*Vira* concept, 55  
 Vishṇu, 12-14, 31, 33, 48, 55, 56, 61,  
 62, 117  
*Vishṇudharmottaram*, 53, 54, 56, 59, 63,  
 64, 70-74, 76-80, 117  
*Vishṇu-purāṇa*, 52, 66, 79, 83, 90  
*Vishṇu Samhitā*, 28  
 Viśvakarman, 2  
*Vitarka (mudrā)*, 27  
 Vogt, Ogden, 2, 3, 8  
 Vraja, 69  
*Vratakhanda*, 79, 80  
 Vṛindā, 68  
 Vṛindāvana, 67, 68  
 Vṛishabha, 83  
 Vṛishṇi, 55, 63  
*Vyūha* concept, 55  
 Vyūha-Saṅkarshaṇa, 56

Watters, T., 8, 9  
 Williams, Monier, 111

*Yaksha*, 16, 102, 103  
*Yakshi*, 16, 103  
*Yakshini*, 104, 105  
 Yama, 37, 71, 72  
*Yamalārjuna*, 69  
 Yamunā, 37, 39, 40, 51, 53, 54, 63,  
 66, 117  
 Yaśodā, 64, 90  
 Yogin, 17

Zimmer, Heinrich, 79





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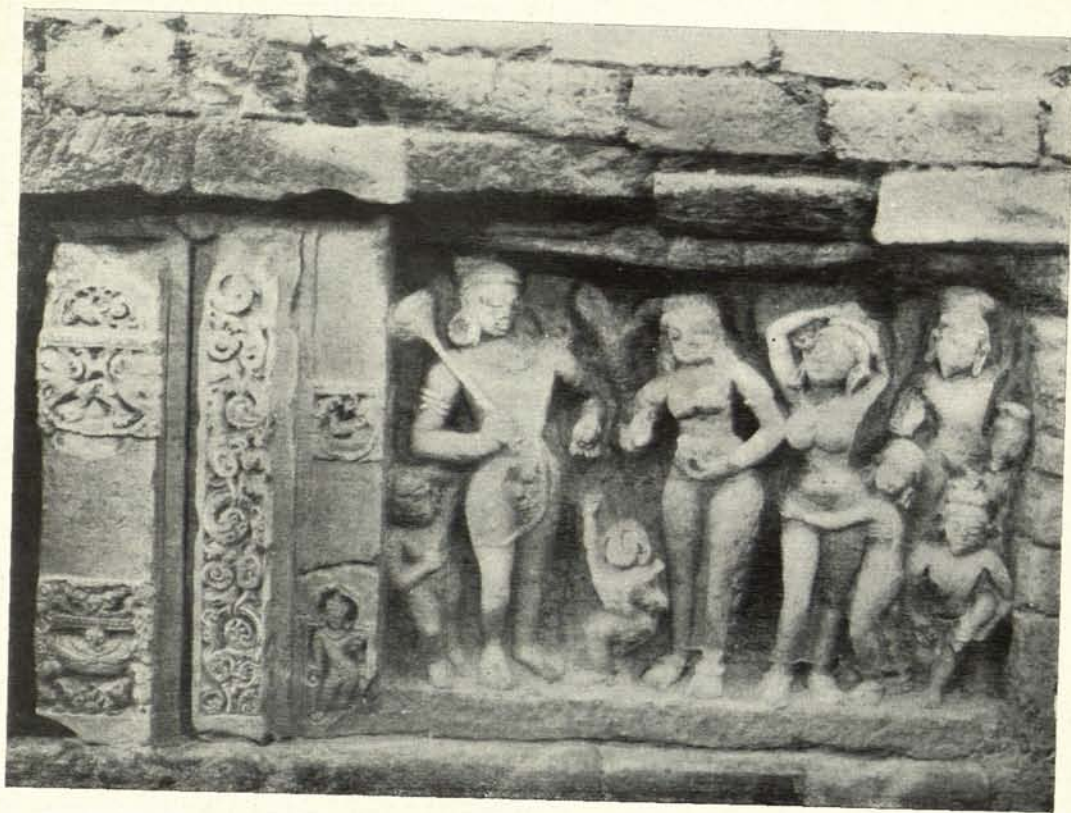


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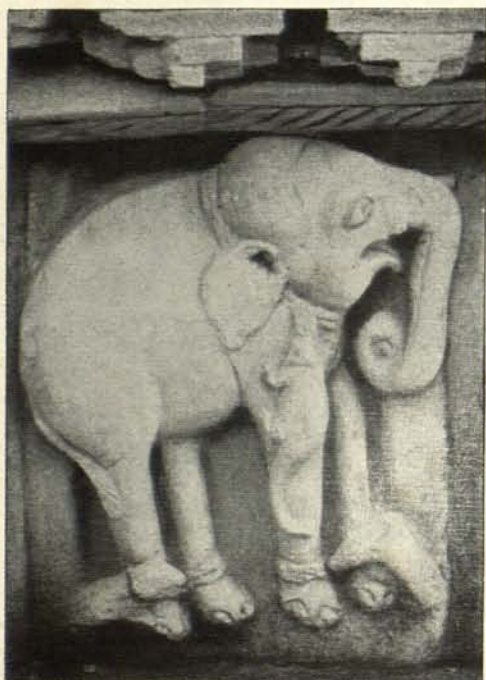




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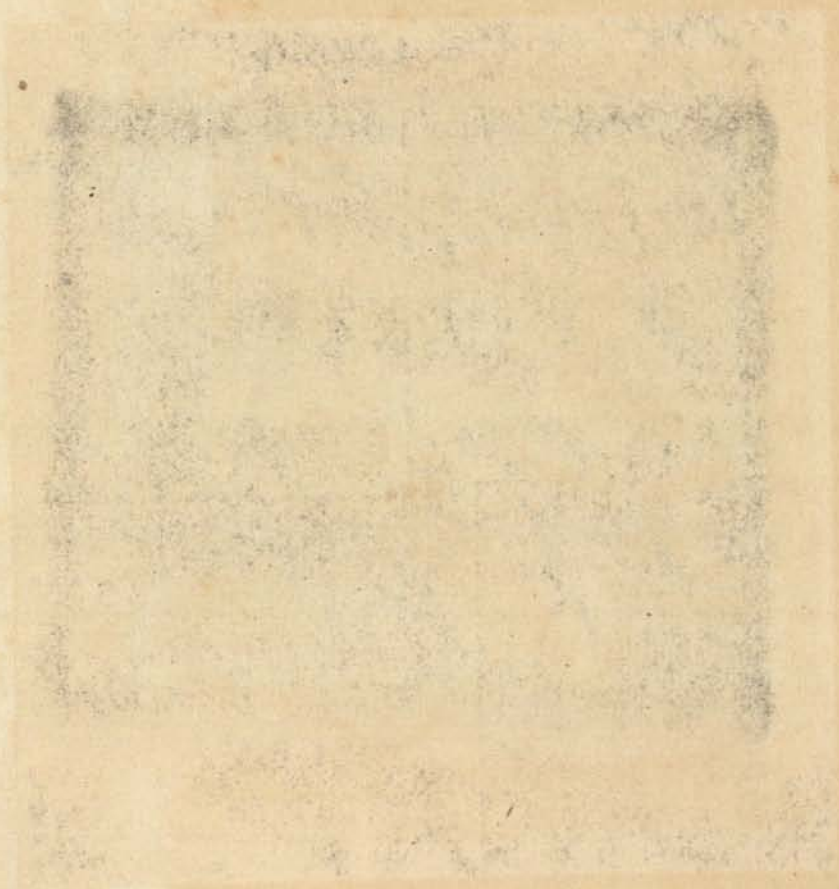


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